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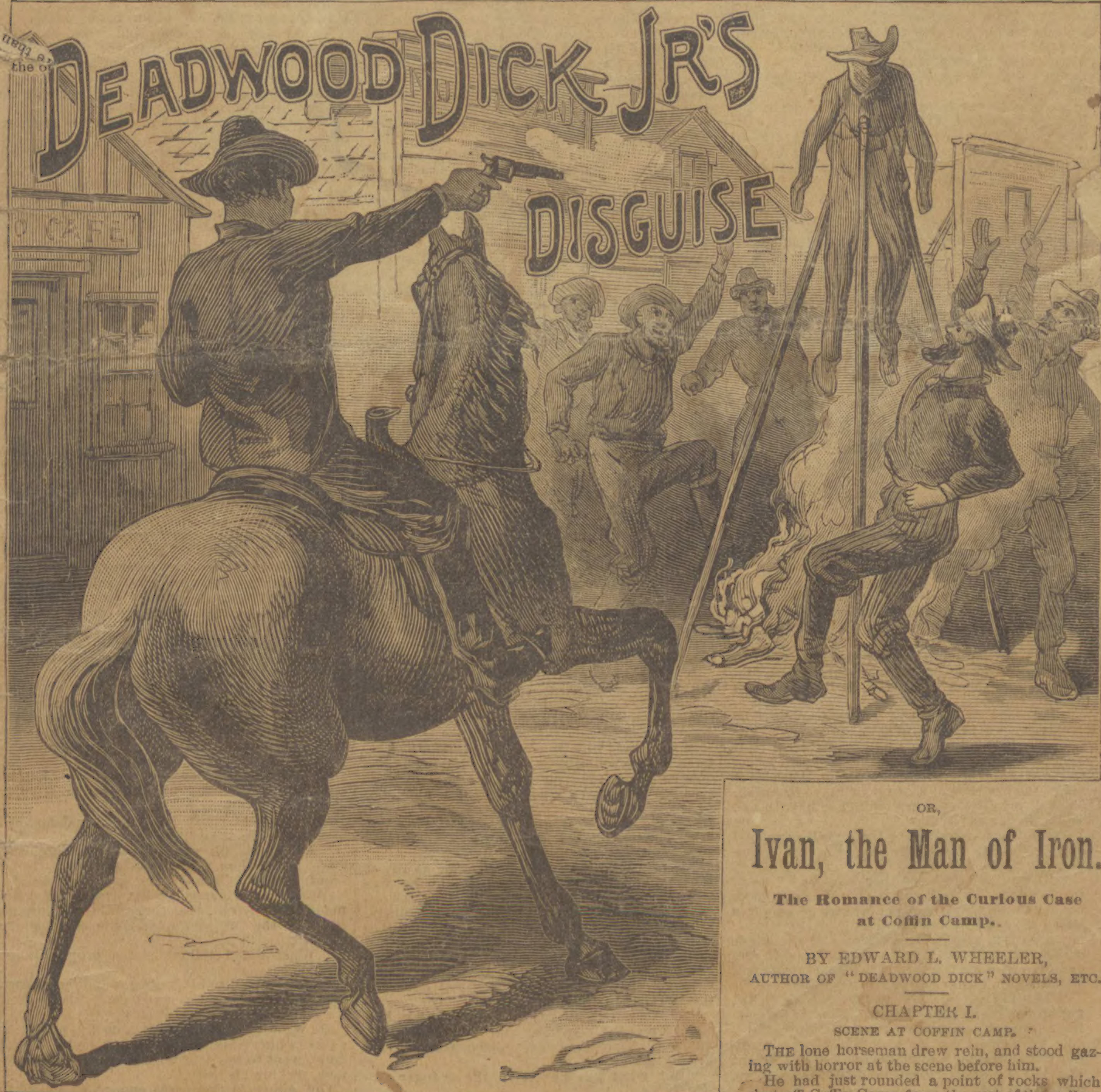
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OR,

Ivan, the Man of Iron.

The Romance of the Curious Case
at Coffin Camp.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

SCENE AT COFFIN CAMP.

THE lone horseman drew rein, and stood gazing with horror at the scene before him.

He had just rounded a point of rocks which shut off Coffin Camp from the rest of the valley, when the terrible sight burst upon his view.

A quarter of a mile distant, with its houses

"THAT'S THE STUFF!" THE HORSEMAN SHOUTED, WHEN HE HAD EMPTIED HIS REVOLVERS INTO THE FIGURE, AND HE DREW REIN.

ranged along the rocky wall as if backing up against it to stand defiantly at bay, was Coffin Camp, with its broad "playground" in front. And it was there on that "playground"—as it was locally called, that the awful scene was being enacted.

The horseman had heard loud shouting, even before he rounded the point of rocks, and had hastened forward to learn the cause, with the result shown. For the moment it seemed to deprive him of power of action.

First to catch his eye had been a huge fire, and then, round the fire, the citizens dancing like so many wild Indians, or worse, shouting and screaming with all the power of their lungs. And hanging over the fire, supported by three poles joined at the top, was a human form!

"The demons!" the horseman gasped. "What can they be up to? I must take a hand in this thing. If that poor devil isn't already roasted, he soon will be. I'll see what is going on here."

And with that he put spurs to his horse and dashed across the open toward the camp, with the speed of the wind.

He had revolvers in hand now, and by the determined expression of his face it was plain that he would not hesitate to use them, if necessity compelled.

Ere he had gone half the distance across, however, the grim expression of his face faded into a smile, his purpose changed with the expression, and on coming up to the fire he circled around and around it, emptying his weapons into the figure on the poles, shouting and yelling with the loudest.

When half-way from the point of rocks to the fire, the horseman had made a discovery. It was not a human, but a figure in effigy; and, when he had come nearer still, on the breast was seen a card, and on that card, in letters bold and black, the name:

"DEADWOOD DICK."

"That's the stuff!" the horseman shouted, when he had emptied his revolvers into the figure, and he drew rein. "I wondered what in all creation you could be up to, but when I caught sight of that name, that explained it all. If there is a man on the face of the earth who deserves just this, that *Deadwood Dick*! And sooner or later he is bound to come to it, too!"

All the shouting had now ceased, and the rough, villainous-looking men were gaping at the new-comer, some with hands on their weapons.

"An' who in thunder mought *you* be, stranger?" one ferocious-looking fellow demanded.

"I am Iron Ivan," was the response; "sometimes called Ivan, the Man of Iron."

"Don't reckon as we ever heard of yer, mister."

"Maybe not, gentlemen, and that's your loss. Now let me inquire if I am at the place called Coffin Camp?"

"That's whar you be, mister," the ferocious-looking individual assured. "An' seein' as you ar," he added, "what's yer business hyar?"

The horseman had been quietly reloading his revolvers while he put the question and received answer, and now thrusting the weapons into his belt he slipped from the saddle and extended his hand.

He of the ferocious appearance gave his own—the offer was so hearty and unreserved, and the stranger shook it warmly, at the same time making reply.

"I'm here in search of kindred spirits," he declared. "I have heard of Coffin Camp as the toughest spot on earth, and I think it will suit me to a T. Besides, I have got to keep out of the grip of the law, and it has hit me that this is about the best sort of a camp for me to locate in. That is, provided you are willing to harbor me. What do you say?"

There was a good deal of low growling around and many dark looks were cast upon the stranger.

"Et wull hev ter be as ther boys say," he of the ferocious looks returned. "We wull have ter debate on ther question afore we gives yer a 'cided answer."

"All right, go into a committee of the whole and talk it over; and at the same time, if you can give me something to eat, I'll fortify myself within. I'm as hungry as a famished coyote."

"Yer kin git all yer wants, sich as et ar", right over thar at ther Bob-tail Flush," indicating a miserable saloon, the best the camp afforded. "Go ahead, an' we wull take your case onder 'sideration an' see what's ter be done about et. We is mighty 'tic'lar 'bout our sasiety hyar, as you kin bet."

"Yes, I can well believe that," with a look around at the villainous crew. "You seem to

be quite a select circle. I like the appearance of you, and if you conclude to back me up, I can laugh defiance at the law and all its jackals. But don't let me try to influence you one bit. I'll go and feed, and you just think the matter over, giving me the benefit of the doubt, if any comes up."

With that he turned away in the direction of the saloon, leading his horse, the whole crowd gazing after him.

And just here a word or two about this Coffin Camp.

It was the one dark spot in the county in which we find it, a place into which no officer had ever yet ventured and come out alive.

Its denizens, almost to a man, were bad, and it made its boast that no honest man was allowed to stay there. Such, when they strayed into the place, were robbed and turned away with a warning—that was generally heeded—not to come again.

Let such strangers once fall under suspicion as being officers or detectives, however, and the chances were about nine to one against their ever getting away. Coffin Camp closed over them, in a way known only to itself, and that was the last of them. And there had been more than one or two such instances, too.

The mayor, so-called, of the camp, was one "Terrible Thomas," the same ferocious-looking customer who has been casually introduced. He was head of the bad gang, now that a greater than he, one "Guerrilla Jake," had "passed in his chips" and "shuffled off the scene. And this same "Thomas the Terrible" was scarcely second to what his predecessor had been.

"What do yer think of ther cuss?" the Terrible Thomas inquired.

"Et hits me hard in ther stummik!" answered one man, "thet he ar' a durn spy, *that's* how et hits me."

"Bet yer life on't!" echoed many more. "Never heard o' no Ivan o' Iron, or whatever et war thet he called hisself, in me life," one added.

"I 'gree with yer," declared the Terrible. "We hev got ter size him up well, boyees, afore we let's him git a foothold hyar, an' that's what's ther matter, you bet."

"You bet et ar'!"

By this time the heat had caused the effigy to take fire, and seeing it, the wild denizens of the camp began again to whoop and yell, resuming their dance.

"Dance, you gentle kittens, dance!" screamed Terrible Thomas. "Go inter et, heel an' toe! Git down on one fut and up on t'other so quick thet yer won't tech ther ground more'n three times out o' five! Go inter et, I say! Whoop! Whoo-oo-oo! *You-ow-ow-ow!*"

And into it they went, with all the energy they could muster into their moving legs, whooping, yelling, swearing, and firing their weapons at the fast consuming effigy on the poles.

"Go inter et! Go inter et!" screamed the mayor. "This don't begin ter 'spress ther fun et wull be if we git our grip onter ther real Deadwood Richard! Nol Nol Nary! We'll tie him up by his toes, stick him full o' pine splinters, an' then tetch him off like ary torch! Oh! we'll make him sick of ther job he done fer poor Jake, or I'm a liar!"

And the echoing shout made the air tremble with its vibrations.

The effigy dropped from the poles into the flames, was soon consumed, and the crowd turned away toward the Bob-tail Flush.

In the mean time the lone horseman had entered that establishment, leaving his horse just outside, and made inquiry of the proprietor concerning some satisfying filling for his inner self.

He was welcomed, and in a brief time the best of the house was before him—"such as it was," as the mayor had said.

The proprietor, as villainous looking as any of the rest, inquired of the stranger who he was and what had brought him there, and the answer was the same as had been given the others.

"By the way," the stranger presently inquired in turn, "what is all the uproar about out there? What has that accursed Deadwood Dick been doing to your good citizens, that makes them get up on their hind legs and howl like this? What has he been up to?"

"If ther boyees git their grip onter him oncet," was the response, "he will most likely find out. They'll cut him up piecemeal an' feed him to ther cats."

"But, what has he done?" the stranger persisted.

"Done! What ain't he done, you'd better ask! He hev been ther death o' ther best man

this camp ever knowed, that's what. Guerrilla Jake fell by his hand, an' ther boyees means ter square ther 'count with him."

"That's the idea, is it? Then I am just in time for the ball. I am against this Deadwood Dick, tooth and nail, and if your people will take me in with them, I'll make every effort I can toward giving them all the revenge they can ask for. And it will do me good to see that fellow in their hands, too. I'll mention it to your mayor, I guess."

"But they won't listen to et," the proprietor of the "shebang" prophesied. "They is mighty s'picious of strangers. You will have ter prove who you be, anyhow, afore they'll 'low ye ter stay hyar."

"Is that so?"

"You bet et ar'! But, hyar they comes, straight fer ther shebang, an' by ther looks o' things I reckons they is comin' ter see you."

"All right; let 'em come. I don't ask any favor of them, only that they'll let me finish my meal. I don't suppose they are rough on a stranger, are they? At any rate not so rough as that, I hope."

The crowd was drawing near, and the loud murmur of voices could be plainly heard.

The war-dance they had been executing had worked them into an almost frenzy, and woe to this stranger if their suspicion fell upon him.

Nearer they came, at a rapid walk, and into the saloon bounded Thomas the Terrible, the others pressing at his back. And in one hand gleamed weapons.

They all glared around, and seeing where the stranger was, advanced toward him.

"Stranger, look hyar," the Terrible thundered.

"All right; I'm looking," was the quiet response.

"Then hearken ter what I hev got ter say: You wanted us ter go inter a 'mittee of ther whole, or words to them effect, an' give you ther benefit of ther doubt, ez you called et. Now, that's what we hev done, an' ther general opine seems ter be that you is a cussed spy; an', what's more, that you is *Deadwood Dick*! What has yer got ter say ter that ar'?"

There was a wicked gleam in the eyes of the questioner, and his men stood by, grim and silent, weapons drawn.

CHAPTER II.

A DARING PROPOSITION.

THE accused man laughed heartily, and with the utmost freedom.

"That is the richest joke yet," he declared. "What in all creation ever put it into your heads that I am Deadwood Dick? This beats anything I ever expected to run up against. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Oh, yer kin laugh," he was told, "but et ain't no durn joke, you kin bet on that. Kin you prove thet you ain't Deadwood Dick?"

"Can you prove that I am? My question is about as fair as yours, I guess."

He spoke with easy carelessness.

"Et ain't no matter o' proof wi' us," was the retort. "S'picion is enough fer us, an' ef that ain't cleared away, then we does somethin' else."

"But you promised to give me the benefit of the doubt. How is it that you come here and jump on me so quick? You don't give a fellow half a show for his money. How about it?"

"That's jest it. You wanted the benefit of ther doubt, an' yer has got it. We has a doubt, an' a mighty hefty one, too, that you ain't jest what yer claims ter be, an' you is goin' ter git ther benefit of it, you bet."

"Well, that's a new deal, anyhow. Let me get away with this grub, however, gentlemen, and then I'll talk to you."

He had kept right on eating, and his coolness seemed to puzzle them.

"All right, fill yer locker," the ringleader gave permission, "and then amble out to th' front, whar you'll find ther court assembled."

With that, Thomas the Terrible wheeled a made his way out, the others following him until only the proprietor and the stranger remained.

"What did I tell yer?" the proprietor observed.

"You seemed to hit it about right," the stranger responded. "But, you can't blame them for being careful. I don't anyhow."

He went on with his eating, coolly, taking no pains to hurry himself, and when he had finally done, went to the door with easy quite-at-home-ness, picking his teeth.

One glance without was enough to show him that everything had changed. The fire some distance off was now burning low, and not

person was near it. The great crowd was assembled before the saloon door.

There on the "playground" was made up a seat for Judge Lynch, after the usual style, and around that the crowd was ranged, keeping only a narrow opening from the saloon door to the front of the judge's seat. And all seemed to be waiting in patient silence.

"Hullo, thar ye be, hey?" the Terrible called out, when the stranger appeared. "Amble right on out hyar, an' we'll try your case with as much soonness as we kin. You'll git a fair hearin', but it will be a trial w'out any frills an' trimmin's an' sich. Come right on an' face ther music, mister."

But the stranger was looking around for his horse.

"Where is my horse?" he demanded. "It seems to me he has disappeared, if my eyes don't deceive me."

"Wull, yas, he hev been taken keer of," he was informed. "Yer see, we is none too flush o' hosses hyar, an' ef so it happens that you is found guilty an' warned out, or wuss, we takes ther critter fer damages. See?"

"Ha! ha! ha!" the stranger laughed, "that is a pretty cute game, darn me if it isn't. I like you fellows, the more I see of you, do you know that? It would make me proud to be at the head of just such a band as you would make up. But, I suppose you are waiting for me, and I won't detain you any longer."

So saying, he stepped out and passed through the opening in the crowd to the front.

"Wull, stranger," Thomas the Terrible then spoke, "hyar you is, an' now we wull perceed with ther biz in hand. You is on trial, fu'st, ter see whether you is or is not Deadwood Dick. Then in ther second place, ter see if you is a proper sort o' critter ter be 'lowed ter remain hyar an' be one of us."

"All right: I guess I can stand that, sir."

"Ther hull crowd will be yer jury," the judge went on, "so you kin count on havin' ther fairest sort of a hearin'. I reckon's yer will plead yer own case, seein' as yer has no liar ter talk fer ye."

"Oh, yes, I'll talk for myself," was the easy response. "Let her slide, now, and the best side to win."

"Wull, then answer to ther fu'st count. Be you Deadwood Dick, or be you not?"

"On what grounds do you charge that I am a cussed spy?"

"Wull, on ther grounds o' general s'picion. We happens ter know that he are in this part of ther country."

"Well, that is pretty wide, that's certain. Now let me ask if my coming here had anything about it that would make you think me a spy?"

"That's ther wu'st p'int of all," was the retort. "You kim sailin' in hyar onder full steam, an' when you seen what we was up to, you chipped in on our side ter oncet."

"Well, bless your hearts, citizens, what would you expect me to do? Would I come in here with a whoop and a yell and try to clean you out? I rather think not, if I had any regard for my health; and most assuredly not when I came here to go out of sight."

"Jest et ergain, pilgrim. You have acted erbout ez et would be expected Deadwood Dick would act. We have heard of his caperin's up north hyar a ways, whar he passed himself off for one of our kind; got into one of the best bands that ever rode ther trail an' then finally scooped 'em all in. We ain't takin' none o' that in ours, not if we know it."

"And I can't blame you, either. But how are you going to prove that I am the man you claim?"

"We ain't goin' ter try ter prove et, anyhow not very hard. Et ar' fer you ter prove that you ain't him, an' ef ye can't do that— Wull, it will be bad fer ye, that's all."

"Have any of you ever seen this Deadwood Dick?"

"Nary one of us."

"Then that's bad for me, to begin with. Sorry you haven't some here who have seen him, for that would clear me."

This remark seemed to have the right effect, as the keen eyes of this "Iron Ivan" discovered, as he looked around at the faces about him.

"Would yer be willin' ter stand that test?" asked the mayor.

"I wouldn't ask for anything better," was the response. "That would settle it, right quick, if you could take the word of the man to whom you left the matter. It's rough on me, and that's the fact."

"Wull, say, look 'e hyar, stranger, be you

willin' ter hev us s'arch ye, an' see what yer has got erbout yer clothes?"

"Perfectly willing," was the ready answer. "Let one man come forward and go through me. It will be somethin' new in my line, ter have somebody go through me."

"All right, then, let's have yer weepin's, an' we'll—"

"Oh, come, now!" the stranger protested; "it was bad enough to be taken for Deadwood Dick, but I hope you won't take me for a gilly besides. I will keep hold of my pops, if it's all the same to you. I make it a rule never to part with them under any circumstances."

"But that 'ar don't show a heap o' confidence in us."

"As good as your own in me."

"Wull, mebbly you is right, anyhow. Step up thar, Jonah, an' see what ther gent has got about him."

One of the rascally crew stepped to the fore and proceeded with the business in hand, Iron Ivan offering no objection.

First appeared a watch, then a pocketbook, then some loose money. After that other pockets were investigated. Came then a handful of rings, earrings, etc.

"My last haul," the stranger carelessly remarked. "It didn't pan very heavy, you see. You'll find some more here in this pocket, Mr. Jonah. Don't miss any of 'em, for I'm perfectly willing to show up."

Some more jewelry was forthcoming, then a couple of watches, a woman's pocketbook, and other trifling articles.

The next and last pocket, so far as the searcher knew, brought to light something that was a surprise to them all. At first it had the appearance of being simply a little roll of black silk, tied with a string.

Such it was, of a truth, but it was more, besides. Upon opening it, a silken mask fell out and dropped to the ground. This was picked up and handed to the judge, as all the other articles had been. The other object was then spread out for inspection.

It was a loose silk cloak, evidently intended to cover the upper part of the wearer as he sat on his horse, and was, as said, black. This was enough of itself to occasion a showing of interest; but there was something more yet. Upon the front of this cloak, in letters worked in white, was the name:

"IRON IVAN."

The prisoner, if prisoner he was, looked smilingly on.

"Wull, I ber darn!" the judge ejaculated. "What does yer think of et, boyees?"

"Et do look ez ef ther critter hev guv et to us straight," asserted Jonah.

"Et do that, fer a candid fact," agreed the Terrible. "But et won't do ter be too hasty about cottenin' ter him. That's what I has ter offer."

"Take plenty of time about it, gentlemen," spoke Iron Ivan. "I don't want to force myself upon you if you don't want me, but I would like to cast anchor here with you for a little while, for my own good."

"That's fair talk, but et ar' nothin' only talk, an' talk is ther cheapest thing on ther market, yer know. We hasn't proved that you ain't that cussed Deadwood Dick, an' you hasn't proved that yer is what yer claim. What is goin' ter be did erbout et?"

"That is for you to say, Mr. Mayor. Look at the thing square and fair, and then make up your mind. I didn't come here and yank out this disguise of cloak and mask, trying to force it upon you that I am what I claim to be. If I had, you might have said Deadwood Dick would be likely to do just that sort of trick."

"Yas, I opine we w'u'd, stranger; an' all that ain't sayin' that he wouldn't act et out jest as you ar' doin'."

"Exactly; and I see I shall have to give you further and better proof of what I am. I don't blame you for being cautious, not a bit; I rather like to see it; it will be all the better for me if you do allow me to come in with you. Now, suppose I can put you onto a rich lay, where you can rake in a pile as easy as rolling off a log, how will that hit you?"

"Ef yer does that ar'," answered the Terrible, "we won't ask nothin' else of yer, unless it ar' ter lead us in ther business an' in that way prove what yer claims. That will be ther stuff, hey, fellers?"

"That's what et wull!" was the ready shout.

"Then it's a bargain," the new-comer agreed.

"I happen to know that there is a special stage coming down to Pond Lily this very afternoon, with a lot of the stockholders of the Lily Mine

aboard, and we'll go out to the trail and take toll. After that I don't think there will be any question of doubt in your mind. What do you say to the proposition? How does it strike you?"

"That's jest ther cheese!" cried the Terrible. "You do that 'ar, an' we won't ax fer nothin' funder in ther way o' proof."

"It's a bargain, then. 'I'll show you how Iron Ivan does the 'hold up' act."

CHAPTER III.

COFFIN CAMP, PAST AND PRESENT.

THIS seemed to end the trail, and settled the matter for the time being at any rate.

The crowd greeted the arrangement with shouts of approval, and the stranger was warmly received. For a time his hand was in eager demand for shaking.

Thomas the Terrible, however, had not left his seat, and pretty soon he once more pounded with his heel upon the box upon which his chair rested, calling the crowd to order.

Iron Ivan gave him attention immediately, and the others followed his lead.

"Et ar' all right, an' et ar' all understood," the judge spoke, "but thar is some p'int ter which I want ter call your attention, saloots. An' ther fu'st on ther docket ar' this, ter wit: We don't accept this hyar stranger as our capting—not by a neck full we don't, not yet."

"No, in course not," was agreed.

"I am ther leader, an' no feller is goin' ter take my spurs unless I say so. Stranger, you hear what I'm chirpin'?"

"You are quite correct," was the ready response. "In fact, I wouldn't want to take your place, for maybe you are a better man than I am. If you find I'm of any use to you, make me lieutenant, or something of that sort."

"Waal, we'll talk about that later on; but now, hyar is ther second p'int on ther docket, namely, ter wit: Ef yer goes ter try on any trick with us on this lay yer has planned, et will be death to yer, an' jest about ez quick ez ye kin wink yer peeper; so don't yer fail ter remember that."

"That is all right, and I'm willing. If you catch me up to any business that isn't square, pop me over, that's all. You can't ask anything fairer, I'm sure. Now is there anything further that you want to have inserted in the agreement? Any further clause you want to stick in? If there is, don't be backward about mentioning it. Then when you are done, I want to say a word or two for my side."

"No, I reckon that's erbout all," the Terrible replied. "On this piece of work, howsumdervar, I'll mention that we will give you ther lead, so's we kin see what sort o' stuff you is made of. An' at ther same time I'll be whar I kin cover ye with a pop. If yer means us fair, yer can't offer no kick ter that. Yer will find that we is up ter snuff, an' that yer can't fool us, nary a time. Ther proof of ther puddin' is ther eatin', an' that's ther test we'll give yer."

"Eating me, eh? Well, eat away; you'll find me done to a turn and as full of plums as any pudding you ever helped devour. But, joking aside, keep your eye on me, as I have said already, and if you find me up to any piece of business that isn't right to the line, plug me. And now for what I have to say. When we go into this thing this afternoon, I am to be at the head of the band for the time. That's understood. I want you to pick nine of your best men for the job, and let every man have a rifle. There's nothing so full of persuasion as a grim rifle."

"Haw! haw! haw! You is right, every time. Et shall be jest ez you say. We kin see that you has been thar before."

"Very well. Now, there is a certain narrow spot in the canyon through which the stage must pass. We will be there to hold it up. There's a place where there is only room for a wagon to get through, and then the canyon suddenly widens to forty feet or more. That's the spot for us. We'll let the stage get just through the choke, and then we'll hold it up and go through it in the latest approved style. And right here is the one point that I want well understood: There is to be no killing unless we are forced in to it to defend our lives. Iron Ivan has been called the 'gentleman road-agent,' and I can't allow my reputation to be sullied, you know. Ha! ha! ha!"

"An' I don't see ez we kin offer no kick ter them terms," averred the Terrible. "Et looks ez if yer means ter give us a fair deal all around."

"And so I do. But I'm not doing it for nothing, mind you. When I have given you the

proof that I am one of you, and ready to stand by you, then I want you to take me into your band and stand by me.

"An' we'll do that, if yer proves yerself all wool an' full width."

"That's enough said, then. Now here's another point: I don't know how well fixed this party will be, mind you, but whatever we get, I don't want any of it. You just take it and share it among yourselves. Now, if you can find any fault with my offer, all around, let me know what it is."

This last carried the crowd.

A general shout of approval went up, and Thomas the Terrible sprung down and grasped the stranger's hand.

"You is a chief, you is, an' I know et!" he cried. "Hyar's ther hand of what sez so, too. Boyees, ef this hyar feller don't pan out rich, then I'm a liar."

"Bet yer life on't!" echoed Jonah. "Ef he don't prove his worth, then yer kin hang me erlong with him, that's all. An' as fer his bein' Deadwood Dick— Well, et are pooty plain that he ain't nothin' more'n what he claims."

"Go slow, boys, go slow," the stranger cautioned, smiling. "Don't think I'm too good till I have given you the proof. Don't let it slip your mind that Deadwood Dick might come here and play just such a role as this, as you thought at first."

But the more the stranger said the more he rose in favor.

He was taken in with open arms now, and was told that the whole camp was his to do with as he pleased.

"All right," he agreed, "I'll take advantage of your offer. I'll make myself at home, and get acquainted with the boys. And, by the way, if there is still any doubt in your minds concerning me, just appoint two of your men to watch me. You are welcome to do it if you want to; it won't worry me any."

"No, that 'ar ain't a tall necessary," declared the Terrible. "Ther eyes of ther hull durn camp will be on yer anyhow, an' ther isn't a galoot among us what ain't true blue. No, sir, that ain't needed er tall. But, come erlong, an' let's imbibe some p'izen while we wait. Thar's nothin' kin prove a man's caliber like tanglefoot, every time, an' ef you kin swoller yer p'izen straight, that will go a long ways to'rds settin' ye right in ther eyes of ther—"

"Just hold up right there," Iron Ivan interrupted, raising a finger. "If my caliber has to be gauged by that standard, I won't pass. I shut down on that sort of thing some months ago, slick and clean. You couldn't get a drop of it down my neck if you paid me for it. And just here I want to say one word more: I want you to select your nine men here and now, and if one of them touches a drop of your 'p'izen' before the time is up for us to start, it is no go, and I'll draw out. I never go out on the trail with men who are not entirely clear headed. What do you say?"

"Wull I bar durn!" gasped the Terrible. "This hyar ar' somethin' new, etar'. You seems ter be quite a saint, stranger."

"Can't help what I seem; that's my platform, every time, and I'm on it hard with both feet. Do you agree to what I've said? If you don't, then it's no go, that's all, unless you want to go it alone."

"Yas, durn et, we'll do ez yer asks, fer this oncet, anyhow. But you draws a ha'r too fine, you does. Thar war Gorrilly Jake, he wouldn't never go out on ther road unless he had his b'iller more'n half full, an' he was no slouch, you bet!"

"And where is he now? Perhaps if he had kept his head a little more clear, and his nerves more steady, he wouldn't have got dosed. You may think about it what you please, but with me it is business first, *always*. After that, then you can fill your skins just as full as you want to."

"Et ar' no use kickin'," remarked Jonah. "You fellers of ther nine hev got ter go dry till after ther stage racket. As fer me, Terrible Tommy, you kin please count me out of that. I couldn't never stand et ter fast so long. Et would nigh erbout play me out, an' you know I ain't very strong. No, I opine I'll hev ter be excused."

This raised a laugh among the villainous crowd, and Jonah was readily excused, as he was a man who would not have been selected anyhow.

Thomas the Terrible lost no time in raising his required number of picked men out of the forty or more present, and after pledging them not to touch a drop of the hurtful, the crowd broke up.

Iron Ivan made the request that his horse be shown the best care the camp was able to bestow, and that having been pledged by Thomas the Terrible, who gave the order forthwith, these

two and others repaired to the Bob-tail Flush, the only public resort the camp boasted.

There, in his quiet way, Ivan, the Man of Iron, told something more about himself than he had told hitherto. He was from Arizona, he explained, where he had won such a reputation that everybody desired his acquaintance, especially the officers, and as they had pressed their attentions upon him to the last degree, he had thought it the proper thing to get up and get out.

And along with that story went any number of reminiscences of hairbreadth escapes, all of which were strictly true, too, the only difference being that the narrator was putting himself in the other fellow's place in most of them.

In return, Terrible Thomas told much about himself and Coffin Camp.

The camp, it seemed, in the first instance, had belonged to some miners who had struck paying panning in the creek on the opposite side of the "playground," as the flat was called.

These miners had put up most of the shanties, and had named the place Horseshoe Flats, owing to the curving of the rocky wall against which the buildings were backed. And there they held forth, defending their camp against all comers until after the rich find at Pond Lily.

There, soon, was opened a mine that proved a staying success, and Pond Lily was speedily a young city. Panning in the creek at Horseshoe Flats was too tame in comparison with the gilded reports that came from Pond Lily from time to time, and finally the miners packed up their tools and deserted their claim for the newer sensation.

It would have been well enough for them, perhaps, if they had made their move earlier, but as it was they found no employment awaiting them when they reached their destination. The mine at Pond Lily was paying big wages for common labor, but it was well supplied, and there was no opening for the new-comers. They jamboreed around the young city until their money was spent, when they set out to return to the creek to reopen business at the old stand at Horseshoe Flats.

In the mean time, the usual thing to follow a rich strike, a band of road-agents had appeared near Pond Lily, and were making it a matter of money or life to all travelers to and from that place. And when these honest miners got back home, what was their disgust to find that their camp had been taken possession of by the outlaws, who refused to give it up. And they were able to hold the place, too, having every advantage, and hold it they did.

There was a fight, in which the miners got the worst of it, leaving several of their number to make the starting of a cemetery there, and the rest withdrew to seek pastures new. The outlaws had not outnumbered them greatly, but they had had the advantage of position, and that was everything.

These outlaws, of which Terrible Thomas boasted that he had been one, renamed the place, calling it Coffin Camp, and there they had remained to the present. It was a place of refuge for villains for whom honest society had no further use, except to grace the "business end" of a rope at a "hanging-bee;" and they had gathered there, one by one, till at last there were forty or more of them.

Thomas had been second in command, and, as said, after the taking off of the leader, Guerrilla Jake, he had stepped into first place. The camp was the plague-spot of all that country, and two or three times it had been attacked, but always with defeat for the besiegers, and after each victory the outlaws had become worse than before. And such was the situation at the time of our romance.

CHAPTER IV.

EXPLAINS A MYSTERY.

THE city of Pond Lily was a different sort of place.

It was a city of the usual mining-camp style, but on a scale of more than usual magnitude.

It had several paying mines, of which the first, oldest and best was the "old original" of the camp, the Lily Mine.

This mine alone employed close upon a hundred hands, and the aggregate of the others made up several hundred more. Hence there was a population that numbered nearly a thousand souls.

And it was a wide-awake, "whooper-up" city of its kind, too. It boasted more modern improvements to the square inch than any other spot of its size within a hundred miles.

More than that, it made the boast that it was

the wickedest place within the same limits, Coffin Camp excepted. That, it was admitted, was a degree worse.

When Pond Lily would no longer permit a rascally knave to remain within its boundaries, the only harbor of refuge known was Coffin Camp, and thither the said rascally knave generally repaired in all haste, provided he escaped the rope at Pond Lily, which was not always.

But there are kinds and degrees of wickedness.

Pond Lily, as a whole, kept within the pale of the law, while Coffin Camp, being on the other side of the line, had no respect for law, man or anything else. It was a law unto itself, as preceding chapters have shown.

However, here were these two camps, within a dozen miles of each other, and with all her population, Pond Lily, to this time, had been unable to crush Coffin Camp out of existence.

As stated, it had been attempted on several occasions, but always with defeat for the attacking party, owing to the impregnable position of the outlaw camp. With its modest half hundred, it was in position to set an army at defiance, almost. There was no known way of getting at it, except from the front, and once let the attacking force appear on the "playground," and the defenders could pick them off at will. Once the attempt had been made at starving the rascals out, and the valley was blockaded for a whole week, but during that time these very knaves, under their leader, made a raid on Pond Lily one night and carried off provisions enough to last them six months.

By what means they had left Coffin Camp and returned, was unknown, but the fact was there, and was not to be disputed. Since then, the camp had been allowed to exist for the best of reasons, that Pond Lily did not know how to deal with it.

One night recently the stage to Pond Lily, later than usual, had been held up by the outlaw band—or rather, the attempt had been made to hold it up—but scarcely sooner had the order been given to stop, than there was a flash and report from the top of the old hearse, the leader of the band toppled out of his saddle, a passenger grabbed the ribbons out of the hands of the driver, and away the stage went spinning, while a shout of defiance was sent back in these words:

"Take that as a reminder that Deadwood Dick is around, you devils!"

The outlaws fired after the stage, of course, soon as they could recover from their astonishment, but their bullets lodged in the baggage behind, or flew harmlessly by.

The man laid low on this occasion was none other than Guerrilla Jake, and no wonder that Coffin Camp had a score to settle with Deadwood Dick, and that the worst of fates would be his should he chance to fall into their hands.

"Now, strange as it may seem, nothing had been seen of Deadwood Dick at Pond Lily. That he had been on the stage that night, no one questioned. The driver swore to it with all vehemence, and extolled the manner in which he had laid out the outlaw chief and hustled the stage along out of their hands; but that was as far as he could tell anything.

It had been a terrible dark night, this night of that occurrence, so dark that the driver had been unable to see the trail ahead, further than his lamps shone and when he rode into the camp he was amazed to find that his passenger on top had disappeared! He had spoken to him not two minutes before, as they came out into sight of Pond Lily, but when the stage drew up before the leading hotel the passenger was missing!

Since that hour nothing had been seen of him, so far as the citizens of the camp knew. It had been much commented upon at first, but in a busy place like Pond Lily a thing soon becomes old, and so it was with this.

The Mayor of Pond Lily was one Howland Kentway, who also, was manager of the Lily Mine, and head of affairs generally.

He was a man of fifty, stern of face and manner, and ruled things with a hand of iron in his own way.

A recent robbery of a shipment of bullion from the Lily, just previous to the death of the outlaw chief, had put him upon his muscle, so to say, and he had made a vow that Coffin Camp must be wiped out.

But, how it was to be done—that was what puzzled him.

It was not easy to find men willing to attack the rascals in their lair. Each man seemed to set too high a value upon his personal safety for that, so the next best thing the mayor could do was to offer a reward of so much per head for every outlaw brought to him.

Nor had even this the desired effect. None

had been brought, to date, and it did not appear likely that any would be captured.

In truth, no one seemed anxious to take the matter in hand. Those who had nothing to lose, cared little, while those who had, thought it far easier to administer the ounce of prevention than to have resort to the pound of cure.

And so matters rested.

Kentway had counted much upon Deadwood Dick, as he publicly declared, after his killing of the dreaded Guerrilla Jake, but as days passed and nothing was seen of him, it was the public verdict that he had become frightened at what he had done and had taken himself quietly away.

Whether this was true or not, it was certainly believed strongly enough, and the good name of our Lion-hearted Richard suffered considerably.

Finally came a day, this day of which the opening of our romance treats, when the mayor was more than usually concerned about the state of affairs. For, be it known, the killing of the outlaw chief had roused the band to the greatest fury, and all sorts of evil had been declared against the city by the new leader, Terrible Thomas.

Warning notices had been found in the camp signed by that worthy, declaring war to the knife, and death the worst for Deadwood Dick, if he could be got hold of. So, as can be seen, Kentway's uneasiness was not without foundation, when we make known that on this day he expected a special stage bearing a party of the stockholders of the mine with which he was connected.

He appeared to be more nervous and fussy than he had ever been on any other occasion.

"Confound that man, Deadwood Dick!" he complained. "What did he want to come here and stir up this hornets' nest for, and then slink away and leave us to stand the result? Confound him, I say!"

But this confounding did not alter the situation any. The stage with the stockholders was coming, and something ought to be done to insure its safe arrival. But was it necessary? That was where the thing hinged now.

Precaution had been taken already. This was not a regular stage day at the camp, and it was not at all likely that the outlaws could know of its coming. It did not seem possible that they could know anything about it. This was the view taken of it by those with whom the manager consulted.

But this did not seem to remove Kentway's uneasiness, and he declared that he should not feel settled in mind until the stage had safely arrived.

It was along in the afternoon that a horseman rode into the town. He was a man of thirty, at a guess, rather good-looking, and was well mounted. His left arm was bandaged and in a sling.

Drawing rein in front of the leading hotel, he made inquiry for Howland Kentway, and that gentleman, happening to be on hand, made himself known.

"I am Richard M. Bristol, better known as Deadwood Dick, Jr.," the stranger informed. "I have heard that I am considered something of a coward here in this camp, and have come to remove the stain from my name if I can."

"Ha! the devil!" ejaculated the mayor.

"No, I beg your pardon," said the stranger; "I didn't say so."

"But I did!" the mayor snapped. "And I say it again—the devil! What has brought you here, after all this delay? Why didn't you show yourself in the first place, after killing that man?"

"What has brought me here now, I have told you. Why I didn't come then, I will explain. I was hit in the arm by a bullet, though I told the driver I wasn't hit, and finally growing dizzy, just when the stage entered the valley, I toppled off, and that was the last I knew till I found myself in a camp twenty miles from here."

"The deuce you say!"

"Exactly. I suppose I wandered there—must have wandered there, for they tell me I was found on the street, the following morning, and there I have been since, resting up. Hearing that I am considered something of a coward here, as I said, I thought I would call around and show myself. What manner of welcome am I going to get from you seeing that I am here?"

"Why, a good one, of course," the mayor cried. "Under the circumstances you could not help what happened. We're ready and willing to take back anything that has been said; eh, men?"

"That we are," was agreed.

"Good enough, then." The new-comer ac-

cepted, and he slipped out of the saddle. "It was my intention to come here and lend you a hand in this affair of yours, but this misfortune overtook me, so I am out of the race for the time being. But my arm will be well again one of these days, and then we'll try a hack at our brave gentlemen of the road."

"It was a misfortune indeed, and an unfortunate affair for us, for the killing of their chief roused the band like a nest of vipers, and they say they are going to make this city suffer for it."

"We'll see about that, one of these days," remarked the young man.

Leaving his horse in the care of a man whom the mayor told to take charge of it, the new-comer followed the mayor into the house, and the news soon spread that the famous Deadwood Dick was in town.

Deadwood Dick was no stranger there, by reputation.

A case he had recently handled, further north, had been the sensation of the day only a brief while before, and everybody was eager to get a sight at him. Within an hour he was like a person on exhibition, at the hotel where he had registered.

Kentway, in the presence of a group, told him about the expected arrival of the special stage, and of the concern he felt for its safety.

He asked the opinion of the lion of the hour as to what ought to be done, but as by that time it had grown too late to do anything, all that could be said was that it would have to be waited for.

There was nothing else to do, so the time was watched eagerly by those most concerned, and by the hour when the coming stage was certainly considered due there was a great crowd waiting and watching for it. But another hour dragged by, and it had not yet appeared, and Kentway, unable to stand it longer, ordered a dozen men to set out to meet it. In a short time they were off.

CHAPTER V.

HOLDING UP THE STAGE.

In the mean time what of that special stage? Setting out early in the day from a railroad point, the afternoon saw it lumbering along on the home-stretch to its destination. It carried a dozen passengers, all told, one of whom was a woman.

Except the woman, it was one party, a company of stockholder of the Lily Mine at Pond Lily.

The woman was a stranger to them all. She had been on the train with them, from further west, and learning at the railroad point that they were going on by special stage, had begged permission to accompany them.

This at first was refused, but as the regular stage did not leave until the next day, and she would have to wait over a day at the railroad, permission was finally given; so she was one of the party, and her presence went to make up the round dozen mentioned.

The driver was a veteran of the line. His name was Zeke Fielding, better known as Squint-eye Zeke, owing to a defect in one of his organs of sight. He was a hearty, whole-souled fellow, full to running over with stories and reminiscences of the trail.

Chief among the passengers was one Dombey Fudge, who held the office of president of the mine. He was a solid-looking man of sixty, rugged as a bear, and the life of the party.

The others were men of the usual assortment, all evidently well fixed in the way financial.

The woman was a plainly dressed little body, good looking, and with a pair of keen, fearless eyes. She had some baggage, and carried a peculiar-looking bag—rather box—supported from her shoulder by a strap.

This little box, leather-covered, was an object of much curiosity among the other passengers, but as they could not very well ask anything concerning it, and as the lady did not volunteer any information, their curiosity was not satisfied.

She was pleasant company, but with ladylike dignity and reserve that could not be disregarded. And she was treated with all respect and courtesy by the gentlemen, several of whom were old enough to be her father, with years to spare. It was, altogether, a pleasant company.

The afternoon was waning when the stage entered a long, dismal canyon, at the other end of which, as the driver promised, they should find their destination.

"Waal," the driver remarked, "considerin' that ther train was better'n a hour late, we ain't done so bad. Nightfall orter find us thar, I sh'd opine. That be, ef we don't git held up."

"And what do you mean by that?" asked

Dombey Fudge, who was taking his turn on the box—an honor they had been sharing from time to time. "A meeting with gentlemen of the road, such as you have been telling us about, I suppose."

"You hev hit et, right on ther head," the driver assented. "Thar's one of ther wu'st bands 'twixt here an' Pond Lily that yer ever heerd on. An' ef they does hold us up, fer ther luv o' goodness don't try ter fight 'em, or et wull be death to ther hull kit an' caboodle of us."

This word of warning was passed along, and for a time the conversation was on the subject of road-agents in general, and those of this trail in particular.

But as time passed and nothing was seen of them, and they were finally within ten miles of their destination, it began to be a matter of congratulation that they were going to get through untouched.

"Et don't do ter crow too 'arly in ther mornin'," warned Squint-eye. "We ain't out of ther woods yet. Still, thar is less miles ahead than ther' be ahind us, an' thar's somethin' in that. But this hyar canyon is ther place ter look fer ther cusses, ef we is ter meet 'em er tall."

They were now in a very narrow part of the canyon, and ahead, a short distance, could be seen a portion where it abruptly widened.

As the driver ceased speaking, the stage emerged into this wider part, and as it did so, suddenly came the ringing order:

"Hands up, therel or take pills!"

"Whoa!" the driver promptly responded, clapping on the break and pulling up hard on the ribbons.

The stage was brought to a stop in the shortest kind of order, and there, ahead of and around it, were discovered half a score of masked men, all save one with grim rifles presented.

The exception was the man whose horse blocked the trail immediately ahead.

In his hands gleamed a pair of dangerous revolvers, and it was he who had given the order to stop.

He was masked, like the rest, but there was more to say of him. He wore a loose black cloak, as it seemed to be, and on the breast of it was the name—

"IRON IVAN."

This, in plain letters of white, was the most striking thing about his whole appearance. Evidently his name; it was too plain to be mistaken for anything else.

"Hyar we is!" sung out the driver, putting up his hands as soon as the stage had been brought to a stop. "What is yer pleasure, Mister Iron Ivan? I see that's ther name yer carries, though I reckon you is a stranger hyarabouts."

"Hands up, every one, and keep them up, that's the first and vital thing," the leader of the band answered. "We must ask you to pay toll, if you please, gentlemen. You can't find any objection to a simple request like that, I am sure. Get down and out of there, every soul of you, and no delay about it."

"This is an outrage!" stormed Dombey Fudge. "You ought to be hanged, every one of you. This is high-handed robbery; nothing short of it!"

Iron Ivan laughed.

"That is what some are uncharitable enough to term it," he admitted. "But, be moving, gentlemen, or the worse for you. And hands up, every one, or it will be death for you, and surer still if you resist. Come now, *hustle!*"

"That's what's ther matter," chipped in another of the band, no other than Thomas the Terrible. "These hyar rifles is jest itchin' ter puke lead at yer, an' ef thar ain't some movin' on your part mighty quick, they'll do et, too."

"Come, folks, we'll have ter obey ther call," observed the driver, as he proceeded to get down-himself. "They holds ther best hand, an' thar's no use o' our kickin' over ther traces. Et won't do no good. Might ez well git down an' ante out our leetle boodles."

"And mind that you keep your hands well up," cautioned Iron Ivan.

Blastering and complaining, the passengers proceeded to get down and out, and last of all came the little lady.

At sight of her Iron Ivan might have been noticed to start. That he recognized her was not to be doubted. His start might have been noticed, we say, but it was not.

"Ha! a lady among the rest, eh?" he observed. The woman was looking at him with strange interest, her face pale and her lips compressed. Perhaps she thought she recognized the voice!

"Yes, a lady with us," retorted the mine-president. "If there is a spark of manhood about you, you will spare her any share in your

intended robbery. I suppose that is a meaningless word to you, however."

"Which proves that you do not know Iron Ivan," was the response. "I have been called the gentleman road-agent, and I make it a point never to rob women, if they are sensible enough to buy off, and my terms are not heavy. But, more of that later. Now we will proceed to relieve you of whatever valuables you happen to have about you, gentlemen. Collector, do your duty."

The driver and passengers were out in line, with hands up, and one of the outlaws now advanced to the head of the line and proceeded to "go through" his man, putting everything into a handy bag at his side.

The little woman was the last in the row, holding her hands up like the rest, and her eyes were still fixed upon Iron Ivan.

The "collector" did his work rapidly and thoroughly, and soon came to the end of the line, except the lady.

"Stop there," Iron Ivan ordered. "I will attend to the lady myself. Come back to your place, now, while that fat party removes his boots. He did not pan out quite fat enough to satisfy me."

One of the passengers was a rather stout personage, and this remark was aimed at him.

"Me?" he interrogated.

"Yes, you!" was the answer. "Off with your boots, and lively about it!"

"It is an outrage!" the fat party stormed.

"It is—"

"Can't help what it is," was the interruption; "off with them! Down with you in the dirt, and off with them!"

Protest was useless, and so the man had to obey. Down he got, and off came the boots, after considerable puffing, and there was the rest of his personal effects, snugly hid away.

"I thought so," Iron Ivan laughed. "Gather it in, collector, and let the gentleman resume his foot-gear. Now if any of the rest of you are holding anything back, you had better disgorge. This is your last chance, you know, so don't refuse."

One or two others brought out articles that had been cleverly concealed, to the amusement of the outlaws, and when all had been taken in, the leader of the band addressed himself to the woman.

"Now, fair lady," said he, "I will give you the conditions upon which you are to go free. That is, that you will give me a kiss."

The outlaws laughed heartily at this proposal. "Never!" the lady exclaimed, with greatest indignation. "Take whatever of value you may find on my person. I will not purchase exemption at such a price!"

"Nobly spoken!" exclaimed Dombey Fudge. "Still, lady," he added, "if you carry much of value about you, I would say give the kiss and so save your bacon—er, hem! I mean your valuables."

"I carry nothing so valuable as my honor, sir," was the scorching retort. "I scorn such a proposal as this rascal has made. Take my money and simple jewelry, sir," to Iron Ivan, "but do not attempt to take any liberty with me. If you do, it will not be well for you."

"Ha! ha! ha!" the outlaw chief laughed. "You are quite a novelty in the way of calico, my pretty lady. Now I would prize a kiss more than anything else you might have to offer. Hands well up, gentlemen, or these rifles will speak! I say I would prize the kiss, lady, and I hope you will reconsider your determination. It is getting off cheap—"

"If it is cheap, then you don't want it. Come, rob me if you will, but don't attempt anything more."

"No; kiss or no kiss, I will not rob you," the outlaw declared. "I admire your spirit too much for that. And besides, the gentleman road-agent can't afford to let his reputation suffer. But I would like to say something to you, in private, if I may."

"I do not want you to come any nearer to me than you are!" was the excited response. "I do not want to hear what you have to say. Rob me, and then let us go on our way. I will not have you come a step nearer, if I have to give my life to keep you off."

There was a pause, and all waited anxiously to see what the outlaw would do about it. It might prove a critical moment for all concerned.

CHAPTER VI.

SOME FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

"THIS is altogether unreasonable," Iron Ivan presently spoke. "We have it in our power to carry you off, if we would, lady—"

"No you haven't, either!"

"What's that?"

"I say you haven't it in your power to carry me off," the lady repeated.

"What's the reason we haven't? How would you hinder us, if we set about doing it?"

"I would kill myself sooner than be taken into captivity by you, and you could not hinder me, unless you killed me, instead."

"Well, you are nerry, and no mistake! But, listen to reason. Here I am disposed to treat you with the utmost consideration. I won't rob you, I will even give up my demand for the kiss, but speak to you I must."

"Then speak to me openly, in the hearing of all."

"No; it must be in private."

"Then you will not speak to me at all. I will kill you if you attempt it, so be warned. I will kill either myself or you."

"And you mean what you say?"

"I certainly do."

That little woman was admired by all. Such a showing of cool nerve from so small a body had never before been witnessed by any of them, perhaps.

"But, what I would say concerns you greatly," Iron Ivan persisted. "Half a minute's talk will be sufficient to tell it. Grant me this, and I promise that not a finger will I lay on you. Nor will I utter one word that need cause you a blush. I am sincere in what I say."

He spoke now in all earnestness, and his voice was slightly changed from what it had been.

The woman's face was changing color, and she was staring at him with eyes at their widest. Surely she recognized that voice.

"And what if I refuse?" she inquired.

"In that case not only will I kiss you, but I'll allow every man of my band to do the same."

This again caused the rascals to laugh.

"Yer kin refuse an' welome, lady," spoke Thomas the Terrible. "Et ar' a long while sence we has had a taste o' honey, et ar', an' I fer ore wouldn't object to et."

In a measure the tables had been turned.

"On your word of honor, then, you will not attempt to touch me, but will only speak to me?" the woman asked.

"I promise you that," was the response. "Give me half a minute's talk with you, and that's all I ask, and all I will demand. After that you and your friends may go on."

"Then fer ther luv o' goodness let him chin to yer fer ther half minnit," put in Squint-eye, the driver. "Ef yer don't, we won't git through ter-night. What he'll say to yer can't kill, that's sure. an' yer has got et on yer own terms, almost."

"Very well, then, I give you leave to speak to me," the woman conceded.

"All right. You advance half way to me, and I will move forward and meet you, and your friends can see all that takes place."

The woman promptly advanced, still holding her hands up, shoulder high, and Iron Ivan rode forward and met her. And when they met, he leaned far over in the saddle and whispered to her.

Immediately she gave a great start, and springing back, looked at him with a face as pale as death.

Only a moment this, and she advanced again and willingly listened to what the outlaw had to say.

As he had said, he detained her only half a minute, when he straightened up, and with a wave of the hand dismissed her.

She turned away immediately, her face still pale, and resumed her place in the line. What had been said to her, no one could guess.

Immediately the outlaw backed away, saying:

"You see Iron Ivan is a man of his word. I am the gentleman road-agent, and my word is as good as my bond, and a good deal better, for my bond wouldn't be taken. No matter about that, however. Now you may bundle in, pilgrims, and be on your way. And when you get to Pond Lily, just give my best respects to the worthy citizens there, and say that Iron Ivan from Arizona is going to take a hand against them. If they want to make anything out of it, let them come on."

With that, the passengers were allowed to get aboard the stage again, and were soon ready to start.

"You shall pay for this, you rascals!" declared Dombey Fudge, who had never ceased to complain. "You shall smart for this outrage, if there is any law in this wild land."

"Plenty of law," assured the outlaw, "but it's hefty to handle, as maybe you will find. But, you have no cause to complain. You have got plenty of the filthy stuff in the Lily Mine,

and you can spare the little we have taken from you."

"Well, we're off," cried the driver, when all was ready. "Give the word, and I'll show ye how mighty soon I kin dust out o' hyar."

"Well, then, go," the chief *pro tem.* gave permission.

"An' be glad that you're alive," called out Terrible Thomas. "An', by ther way," he added, "ef yer hears anything of a galoot at ther city by name o' Deadwood Dick, tell him we mean death ter him, jest as soon as we kin grab him."

"Yes, my especial regards to him, if he is there," quickly put in Iron Ivan. "Tell him that Iron Ivan is still on deck, and that he sends defiance. If he wants me very bad, let him come and take me. He will get the warmest reception he ever got. And to you, fair lady, my love!"

The driver's whip had cracked, and the stage now whirled on its way.

For a few moments the outlaws stood gazing after it idly, and then with wild laughter they pressed around Iron Ivan, eager to grasp his hand.

Let us, for the present, follow the stage.

"What does yer think of that?" asked the driver, when they had got beyond hearing of the rascals.

"I think it a confounded outrage!" cried the mine president. "The nest of vipers shall be wiped out, if I have to resort to the regular army to have it done. I won't brook this without making a fuss."

"Hope yer won't, but fer ther present they has got 'cidedly ther best of it. They has got all yer collateral. But, say," in a lower tone, "I wonder what he had ter say ter ther gal! Did yer notice how et seemed ter give her a jump, ez et war?"

"Yes, I noticed that, and it puzzled me. It struck me that he must have recognized her, and that he is some one she has known. I'm going to ask her."

Leaning over toward the window, he called:

"Hey, Stokes!"

"Hello!" came a response from within.

"What do you think of the West?" with a laugh.

"Dast the West!" was the snappy reply.

"Well, say, ask the lady what it was the outlaw had to say to her, if she is in the car. Tell. We are rather curious to know, out here."

Silence for a few moments, and then the same voice called out:

"She declines to say, but hints that it was something she would not mention under any circumstances. Rather think the rascal mistook her for some one he had known. She is boiling over with indignation."

"Tell her we'll settle with the rascal, before we are done with him. This has got to be brought to an end, and the sooner the better."

Half-way from that point to the "city," they came suddenly face to face with a body of mounted men.

It was the party that had been sent out by Kentway, to meet them and render assistance if they were in need of it.

As the party completely blocked the way, the driver had to call another halt.

"Hello!" he sung out. "What's broke loose, galoots of Pond Lily?"

"We have been sent out to meet you and see what's the matter," was the reply. "The boss is tur'bly anxious about you."

"A pity you didn't come a little earlier, then," snapped the mine president.

"Why, hev yer been in trouble?"

"Have we? We have been skinned to the buttons!"

"Ther dickens! Then ther boss wasn't on-easy fer nothin'. Oh, but won't he take on when he hears o' this!"

"And it will be time for him to take on, too. If this band isn't wiped out in one week, we shall have no further use for him, I'm thinking."

The horsemen turned, after a few moments' talk, and the stage followed their lead to the camp.

When they appeared in the valley it was night, or very nearly so, and the camp was ablaze with lights. A great crowd was in front of the hotel.

The stage was rushed in with a good showing of speed and spirit, and when it drew up in front of the hotel, the first man to the front was Howland Kentway, who threw open the door.

"Here at last, are you?" he greeted.

"Yes, here at last, with barely our lives," responded Fudge, from the box.

"With barely your lives! Curse it! you don't mean to say you have been gone through, do you?"

"Waal, that's erbout ther size of et, mayor," chipped in the driver. "We got ther hold-up and clean-out in ther wu'st kind o' way."

Kentway went on like a crazy man, while the passengers alighted, and led the mine president off in the direction of the hotel, loudly declaring what he would do, and that without delay.

"We'll clean them out," he cried, "if it takes every man, woman and child of Pond Lily to do it."

This was a sensation, this robbery of the special, and it was more of a sensation to learn that a new chief was in the band, Iron Ivan.

"Iron Ivan!" exclaimed the stranger, when he heard the name.

"Ther same," assured the driver.

"Then he is my man," was the cry. "I will have him, if I have to wade in blood to take him."

"An' who mought you be?" was asked.

"I am Deadwood Dick, Jr."

"Ther dickens! Then I has word for ye. Ther outlaw sent his special regards ter you, an' sent you a invite ter come an' take him, ef yer wants him."

"And it's one that I'll accept," the wounded man declared. "I am hot upon his trail, and he won't escape me for long. There will be a day of reckoning, when I get hold of him."

"Who do you say you are, sir?" asked the woman, who had alighted.

The name was repeated, and the woman gave him a searching look. The expression of her face was a puzzling one.

Later on, when this lady had registered, those who felt curiosity enough to look, saw that her name was set down as Madge Marble, of San Francisco.

CHAPTER VII.

ELECTING A NEW CAPTAIN.

To return to the outlaws, after their bloodless victory in their undertaking.

"You is ther chief, you is, by durn!" cried Thomas the Terrible, as he pumped away at Iron Ivan's hand.

"I thought I could prove my worth to you," Ivan laughed. "But, this was only child's play. The easiest job I have tackled in a long while."

"But et mightn't a been, ef yer hadn't had 'ter back ye up," put in one of the band.

"Oh, of course not; I admit that. You are good men, every one of you, and I am proud of you. Now let's get back to your camp."

"That's ther ticket," agreed Terrible Thomas. "We hev got a pile of collateral ter divvy. Must be a couple o' thousand, at ther least. Durn good streak o' luck!"

"And it's all yours, as I have said," remarked Iron Ivan. "I don't want any share in it. That was the arrangement, and I'm willing to live up to it. I didn't expect we would get enough to pay us for the trouble."

"Et ar' all ther better that we hev," declared Thomas surnamed Terrible. "We wull give you ther jolliest old toast you ever heerd on, when we gits back to ther camp, an' don't ye disremember et, uther. Durn me ef I don't feel like nommyatin' you fer captain."

"Oh, don't be in a hurry about that," Ivan passed over. "I'm satisfied with a less important post, if it is all the same to you. And now, Mr. Thomas, I turn the men over to you. I've done what I agreed to do, and you seem satisfied with my work, so now let's be going. We're done with the trail for the present."

"An' et would be a durn hog what wasn't satisfied," the Terrible declared. "Yas, come on, boyees, an' we'll amble. For'd, now, an' we'll soon put distance abind us. Ding dong dast et, Iron Ivan, but you is ther cussedest cuss that I ever met in mo life, you is! I can't git over ther way yer done et. But, say, why in turnation didn't yer kiss ther gal?"

"That's ther question," another chimed in. "Yer missed ther best part of et, or I'm a lunk."

"An' say, what was et yer said to ther dame?" asked Thomas. "Et war lettin' ber off too durn cheap, et war; onless yer knowed her, an' had ther reasons."

"That was just it," Ivan admitted. "She was a lady I have known, and I had the satisfaction of telling her who I am, so that she could have something to think about for awhile."

"Ha, that war it, hey? Sort o' love affair in the days gone by, I reckons. Waal, that's your business, an' none o' ours, so we'll not meddle any more with it. I wanted ter see ther fun o' your kissin' ber, though— Haw! haw! haw!"

"It might have made trouble," the young stranger explained. "She is full of spirit, and might have kept her threat and killed herself. I thought it best to let well enough alone. We'll let that drop, however. And now for the camp, and to see how much of a haul we have made."

They had started on, but now they increased their speed, and little more was said on the way.

When they arrived at Coffin Camp they dashed in upon the "playground" with a whoop and a yell, Iron Ivan and Terrible Thomas leading.

It was nearly dark, and the home guard rushed out like hornets out of a nest, armed to the teeth and ready to offer fight, and this circumstance told Iron Ivan something important.

By it he saw that an attacking party, coming at night, or at any other time, for that matter, might overcome the men of Coffin Camp, if the force was great enough. And he resolved to mention it to Terrible Thomas as soon as he could.

Seeing who they were, the home guard joined in the shout, and as soon as the returning conquerors drew rein, gathered around to learn the result of their raid upon the stage. And that result made known, there was a wild cheering that made the surrounding rocky walls ring.

And then immediately, their probation over, the men who had been out rushed to the saloon to do harm to their bodies by imbibing freely of the vile stuff there on tap.

Iron Ivan called Thomas the Terrible aside, after he—said Thomas—had "wet his whistle," and said:

"There's something I want to call your attention to, and that right away. I see danger ahead for this camp. I want to tell you of it."

"Ther dickens yer do!" was the exclamation. "Spit her out, then. Let's hear it, although I can't see how et ar'. Why, man, we could almost defy ther reg'lar army, hyar."

"Yes, I know, if you took it in time; but just suppose we had been enemies when we rushed in here, with a hundred men at our backs; we could have cleaned out the place in five minutes. I tell you it won't do."

Thomas the Terrible scratched his head.

"We never thort of et in that light," he admitted. "We has allus expected ter have notice enough, and we kin git under shelter an' pepper 'em in half ther time et takes ter git hyar from ther p'int o' rocks. But I allow you is right, ef et had been as you says."

"Of course I'm right, and as long as I am here I want better protection."

"What would you say order be done, then?"

"Have outposts to guard the approach, day and night."

"We does have 'em, o' nights, but never thort et was necessary ter hev 'em in ther daytime."

"But you see it is. Why, a hundred mounted men from Pond Lily might sweep in here some time, when you were not expecting it, and they'd make you sick in a short time, I tell you."

"Yas, but yer see they dassen't try et on. We has been too many fer 'em two or three times, an' they is afeerd of us. You couldn't git 'em ter go fer us in that 'ar way, an' I'm bettin' on et. That's no danger of ther tryin' et on."

"I don't know about that. You see, this Deadwood Dick is around, and if you believe the stories you hear about him, he would be just the man to propose such a thing. Besides, this robbery will make Pond Lily wild, and when Deadwood Dick learns that Iron Ivan is with you, he will be after us red-hot."

"You talks sound sense, every time, yer does. Say, will yer take ther lead of ther camp, ef I'll nommyate yer?"

"Oh, no; I didn't come here for anything of that sort."

"But I wants yer to. Yer see et ar' like this. Ther boyees all looks up ter me, 'cause I've got ther name, but ter be honest with yer, I ain't got ther head fer plannin'. That was Gorrilly's great bolt, when he was sober."

"And when he was drunk he was worse than nobody. A drunken man has got no business to be at the head of anything. Are you in the habit of taking aboard more than you can conveniently carry?"

"I must own ther I am, sometimes."

"Well, if that is the case, and you really want me to take the lead of your band, I am willing, if the men are."

"That's ther cheese, skippers an' all. I'll call a meetin' ter oncet, an' see what ther ver-dick wull be; but I knows a'ready, jest ez well ez I know me name."

And Thomas the Terrible was as good as his word.

Getting up on the end of the bar—they were in the saloon—he called the wild crowd to order.

"I wants yer 'tention," he cried. "I has a proppyzition ter unfold to yer. I wants ther sentymints of ther crowd on what I'm goin' ter say. Yer all knows ther Iron Ivan ar' ther right sort of stuff, don't yer?"

"Bet yer life on't!" was the wild cry.

"Wull, he hev called my 'tention to ther fack that this hyar camp ain't ez safe from attack ez we hev allus supposed et ter be. He have spotted a weak p'int, an' hev showed et to me. Now what more proof does we want thet he ar' ther right sort of man ter tie to?"

"That's all ther proof anybody could ask!"

"But what's ther weak spot yer tells of?"

That was explained by Iron Ivan himself, in about the words we have quoted.

It was received by the crowd with much satisfaction. The truth of it could not be denied, and every word was approved.

The outposts for the night, by the way, had been sent to their places, so there was nothing to look after for the present, and a full meeting was in attendance at the Bob-tail.

"An' that's what I says," voiced the Terrible.

"Ary galoot what wull come hyar an' take sich interest in our affairs, is ter be trusted. Now, boyees, I am in favor of resignin' my place in favor of Iron Ivan. He hev said he'll take et, ef you ar' willin'."

"But it is an honor I don't seek, mind you," Ivan put in. "It was proposed to me by your captain himself. Isn't that so, Mr. Terrible?"

"Yas, them's ther facks of ther case. Et war all my doin'," Thomas admitted.

"An' we want yer, you bet we does!" sung out a voice.

Said one man:

"Ef ther captin ar' willin', we'd orter be, that's sartain."

"Wull, ez many as is in favor of et, jest sing out," the Terrible put to the test.

There was the beginning of a wild shout of approval, and the motion would have been carried, but one voice louder than all the rest called a halt.

"Hol' on, thar!" the voice bellowed. "I offers a mandymint ter that 'ar moshun, I does. I moves thet if ther candydade kin stand Thomas ther Turrible on his head, in a friendly tussle, then he hev ther post o' honor."

This was received with wildest enthusiasm.

"If you hold to that," spoke Ivan, "I am not likely to win the place, for I see your captain is a bigger man than I am."

"Et don't matter," the man insisted. "You is called ther Man of Iron, an' I opines thar must be a reason fer callin' yer so. What d'yer say to et?"

"Well, I am willing, if your captain is, seeing that you insist upon it."

"Bet yer life we does! What der you say, Turrible?"

"Wull, I'll try et on wi' him, jest fer cod, but I wants him ter have ther post o' captin jest ther same. I may have ther best o' him on muscle, but I know he holds ther best hand on brain."

"All right, jest ez yer pleases erbout that, but we wants ter see er leetle fun ez we goes erlong. Git ready fur et, now."

So get ready they did, Iron Ivan and this other, and presently they were up face to face for a friendly wrestle.

It was to be taken all in good part, and the best two out of three was to decide it.

The men of Coffin Camp well knew what their chief could do, and expected that he would soon stand this stranger on his head, but still there was a reasonable doubt.

And it was that doubt that made it interesting. They were all ready, as said, and at the word from him called Jonah, at it they were to go. And on the outcome of that wrestle was to rest the new chief's laurels.

"Wull, ef yer is both ready," spoke Jonah, "I'll let 'er slide."

"All ready," answered they both.

"Then hyar goes; One, a two, an' a three. Git thar Eli!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RESULT.—WAR EXPECTED.

At the word, the two sprung at it.

It was to be a "catch as catch can" affair, and the first catch seemed to be all in favor of Thomas.

There was a brief struggle, and then presently down went Iron Ivan, under a force of muscle which, apparently, he could not resist. And this was wildly cheered, as would have been the case anyhow.

"I told you so," Ivan remarked, as he got up

again. "I guess I am not a match for your captain here. But he had a better hold than I intend to let him get again. We'll see how it will go this time. I'm ready, sir, if you are."

"I'm all ready an' waitin'" was the response, "an' ef you kin dump me *oncet* out of ther three, I'll treat ther house. I'm ther king pin of this hyer camp, on a try o' muscle, an' et wull take a hefty lift ter upshot me, you bet. Now then, come for me, an' let's see what you kin do."

They sprung together again, and this time seemed to get locked on a more even footing.

There was apparently no advantage for one or the other, and for some seconds there was hard straining on both sides for the mastery.

Suddenly something happened. Iron Ivan seemed to let himself out an extra notch or two, as it was expressed, and up went the Terrible with his heels higher than his head.

At this the crowd cheered again.

Straight up, and still up, did Iron Ivan raise him, until he stood under him and had him wedged against the low ceiling.

"I guess it's my fall this time," he coolly observed, without any sign of effort. "What shall I do with him? I don't want to hurt him, you know, so I'll have to handle him gently."

"Dump him!" "Dump him!"

That was the cry from every side.

"Yes, dump me, ef yer is goin' ter," the Terrible requested. "Et ar' no pleasant sittin' wation ter be in."

"All right, dumped you are, then," and with that the man of iron brought his antagonist down and laid him out upon his back with as much ease as possible.

"I ber gol darn ef you ain't wuss'n iron," Thomas remarked, when he got up. "You is steel, you is, an' cold spring steel at that. How in ther dickens did yer do et, anyhow?"

"Well, I had a hold more to my liking, that time," was the reply. "I am not a boaster, but I am not called the Man of Iron without reason. I can lift a pretty good weight, when I get at it in right shape."

"I should say so, an' I don't reckon et ar' necessary ter try that other round, do you, fellers?"

"Yas, yas! Ther other, by all means!"

"But this one ought to offset two of 'em."

"Et don't matter, we must have ther other one, an' that settles it."

And the way the rough crowd clamored for it, proved that it must be put to the final test.

The two men faced each other once more, and this time it could be seen that Thomas the Terrible fully meant to do the best he could.

And so he did. He was willing to see this new-comer take his place as captain of the band, but he had the human weakness of not wanting to see him excel himself in muscular strength.

There was a pause, and again they caught hold.

This time, as at first, the Terrible seemed to get the better hold, but it was speedily made of little use to him.

Iron Ivan seemed to let out a wonderful showing of strength that he had been holding in reserve, and after a turn or two Terrible Thomas was standing on his head, with nothing to support him.

Half a second he balanced there, and then over he went with a crash, but one that was scarcely heard amidst the shouting.

"That's ther style!" cried the fellow who had proposed this thing. "That's what I like ter see. Now you is captin of our band, Mister Iron Ivan, an' we is mighty proud of yer, too!"

"An' et ar' ther Terrible's treat!" another reminded. "We won't fergit that part of et, hey, fellers?"

"Wull, we ruther reckons not."

"Yas, et ar' my treat, an' I am willin' ter do et," Thomas said, as he gathered himself up. "I am beat, an' I know et. Iron Ivan ar' a better man nor me, an' I am proud ter own et. Nommynater yer p'izen, galoots."

This the "galoots" did not hesitate to do, and for a time the lightning dispenser was kept busy.

Iron Ivan was acknowledged captain of the camp, now, and he took hold of matters with a business hand. Making Terrible Thomas second in command, he directed him to appoint suitable watches for day and night duty.

That was quickly done, and the camp was to be guarded by reliable outposts, whose hours of duty were to be only four out of the twenty-four, so that there could be no excuse for sleeping on duty. Iron Ivan was admitted to be a man of iron, indeed, and the men felt his power from the moment of his taking hold as captain.

Finally he left the saloon, in company with Thomas the Terrible, whose cabin he was to share, and the crowd was left to do their own pleasure.

When they came to that cabin, however, and had made a light, a surprise awaited them.

There on the outlaw's table, written in chalk, was this message:

"TO THE CAPTAIN OF THE HOSTS AT COFFIN CAMP,
GREETING:—

"Kno' ye by these presents that I, Deadwood Dick, Jr., have been in your midst this night, and that you are doomed. Within ten days every mother's son of you will be under arrest. As for Iron Ivan, tell him for me that his days are numbered. I am after you, so look out for me. Make ready for your fate, which is sure to fall. This is no idle warning. You are doomed, as you deserve to be."

"What is this hyar?" cried the Terrible, at sight of it.

"Just what I want to know," responded Ivan. And he read it aloud.

"Great stars!" exclaimed Thomas, "hev thet 'ar cuss been hyer? We'd better scour ther camp, an' mebbey we'll git him."

"Little hope of it. If he has been here, and this certainly proves it, he has taken care to get away again. But it will do no harm to try it. What did I tell you about taking care?"

"An' this hyar proves thet you war right. We'll be on our guard night an' day, an' et will puzzle 'em ter git at us."

"So my days are numbered, are they, Deadwood Dick? Well, I suppose they are, but it will not be for you to make them longer or shorter. Your threats don't scare Iron Ivan greatly."

"No, ner me uther," boasted the Terrible. "Let us *oncet* git our grip onter him, an' ef we don't put him whar we had his effygy, you kin put me thar. We'll toast ther fat out of him, you kin bet."

They went out, and the alarm was given.

Needless to say it stirred up the camp, and put a damper to further foolishness for that night.

A search was made, but to no effect, and when finally the camp retired, it was with a feeling of strange insecurity in each breast.

Coffin Camp had been considered impregnable, and so it was, almost, with proper management, but on this occasion its denizens felt little comfort in that thought.

But if it felt that way upon retiring, how was it next morning, when a far greater cause for uneasiness was discovered. Another find was made, that put the first to the blush. It was a startler.

On the door of every cabin were chalked the names of the inmates, and each name was given a number.

Under the names were written the words—

"Soon to be gathered in, so take fair warning.
DEADWOOD DICK, JR."

The first discoverer raised the cry that brought other denizens out, and on finding that every cabin was similarly scored, there was a terrible scene.

Some of the less brave were for leaving at once, and trying to make their escape while they might, but the majority laughed at this, saying they would stay and see it to the end.

The guardsmen were called to account, but they declared that no one had passed their line, either in or out.

"Kin et be possible that ther cuss hev discovered ther other way?"

So questioned one man.

"What other way?" demanded Iron Ivan, immediately. "I thought there was only one way of getting here."

"We haven't told yer everything yet," answered Thomas the Terrible. "We have another way o' gettin' in an' out when et ar' necessary ter use it."

"The deuce you have! Then you are all right."

"You bet. Et ain't so handy as this way, but et wull do purty well in a pinch."

Iron Ivan did not ask to be shown it. He turned his attention to things that were more immediately important.

"Two men must be placed to guard that way, and that at once," he declared. "If it is known to our enemy, it will be a good plan to lay a trap for him there, I should say."

"Bet yer life!" agreed the Terrible. "I don't see how he kin know that way, fer et ar' one thet wouldn't never be guessed, but et won't be amiss ter have it under our eye."

"And there's another thing," Iron Ivan went on. "We must prepare for an attack. There is no telling what minute one will be made, and we must have every weapon in the camp

loaded and ready for use. We must see to this without delay."

"Et shell be done, by mighty! D'yer hear, galoots? Bring out every gun, pistol an' sich that yer kin find, an' clean 'em up fer business. An' then have 'em all in yer cabins, ready fer instant use, right whar ye kin lay yer paws onto 'em. Thar's a spot o' blood on ther moon."

These directions were carried out without delay, Iron Ivan lending a helping hand, and he was really the busiest man of them all.

In a couple of hours all was made ready, and the outlaws rested upon their oars, so to say.

"Now let 'em come," said the Terrible, in a satisfied way. "An' ef they do, ef we don't give 'em ther wuss dose they have ever got."

"You can say that," supported Iron Ivan. "I feel as safe here as though we had a fort to defend ourselves in. Let them come if they are spoiling for a fracas. I guess we can show Deadwood Dick a thing or two."

"I should smile like ary kangaroo ef we couldn't."

So matters rested for the time being.

Another excitement was in store, however. About an hour later the outposts came running in excited and out of breath, declaring that all Pond Lily was coming to wipe them out.

That there was a *furor* then goes without saying. Iron Ivan took things in hand, hustled the men into the cabins that were to be used in the defense, and in less than twenty minutes everything was in readiness to receive their enemies. Not a scul was in sight on the "playground," and the camp might be supposed either dead, asleep or deserted.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CHIEFTAINS EXCHANGE GREETINGS.

THIS was the outcome of the turn affairs at Pond Lily had taken.

The more Howland Kentway had thought of it, the more enraged he had become, until finally he "swore in his wrath" that Coffin Camp must be cleaned out.

And having come to this fixed determination, he took counsel with Deadwood Dick as to the best means of getting at it. And it was debated at length in one way and another.

There was no getting around the fact that Coffin Camp was in a position to defend itself, and that it could not be taken, by open war, except at great cost to the party attacking. For that reason it was decided to blockade the camp and try once more to starve it out.

This time, it was argued, a better watch could be kept at home, and if the outlaws tried their former trick, they could be caught. And this seemed reasonable enough. So it was determined upon, and at an early hour the following morning a force of forty men set out under command of the wounded detective.

And this force it was that caused such consternation at Coffin Camp when their approach was made known.

It was not their intention now to make an attack, but simply to block the valley.

Hence, as time passed, and the expected charge was not made, the outlaws began to question what could be the matter.

"Et can't be that they don't mean ter go fer us, after all, kin et?" questioned Thomas the Terrible. "They ain't so foolish as ter try ter blockade us ergain, be they?"

"It looks that way, surely," declared Iron Ivan. "If they meant fight, they would have come right on and opened on us, I should think. They are wasting time this way, and have given us ample opportunity to spy them out and prepare for them."

"That's what's ther matter, I do believe. But et do seem funny that they'd try ter starve us cut ergain, if that be their game. They know well enough that we kin git out another way. Et looks ter me like fool work, an' if this hyar Deadwood Dick ar' at ther head of et, I don't go a heap on his generalship."

"If he is at the head of it," declared Iron Ivan, "you can be sure that he has got some scheme on foot. And when he moves, you can look out for a surprise, that is certain. I know enough about the man to assure you that he don't work in ordinary ways, always. He don't claim to be any smarter than other folks, but he has ways of his own that are sometimes peculiar, to say the least."

"Waal, that ar' all right, but ef we git our fins onter him, he will be in a peccoliar fix, an' you kin tell yer neighbors that I say so. We'll roast him, jest ez sure as ther sun shines. Cracky! but et would do me good ter have my grip onter him, an' avenge ther death of Gorrilly Jake."

Now you is a man o' some brain, Iron Ivan, an' I want you ter see ef that very thing can't be brought about. Et wull be one stroke fer us an' two fer yerself, yer see."

"We'll see what can be done. But I'm going out there and see what is going on."

"You'd best have a keer how yer shows yerself."

"But I don't intend to show myself."

"How then wull yer go?"

"I'll hug the wall. I want you and about a dozen men to come behind me, at a distance of a couple of rods or so, so as to defend me in case they try to capture me. If Deadwood Dick is in command, he won't shoot me; he'd rather have me alive."

"Good enough; I'm yer primrose fer that business. Git ready, an' I'll have ther men on hand."

So the Terrible went out, and when Iron Ivan appeared, masked, and with his peculiar cloak on, he found him with his picked dozen, ready to accompany him.

"I see you are ready," Ivan remarked.

"Yas, you bet."

"Well, come along after me, and if they try to scoop me in, don't hesitate about cutting them down. And take care not to plug me in mistake."

"You kin trust us fer that. Lead on, an' we'll be after yer, an' you bet we'll stand at yer back till yer belly caves in, too. That's no coward blood in us, ef I do say et myself."

"I can believe that. Well, here goes." So the Man of Iron set off at a rapid stride, keeping close to the wall, and heading for the point of rocks.

And after him marched the men, in open order, ready to carry out his directions in event of its becoming necessary for them to do so. They were a grim, villainous, hard-looking crew.

Ill would it fare with Deadwood Dick, if they once got hold of him, and it hardly seemed credible that he had really ventured into their den on the previous night, the proof to the contrary notwithstanding. But it would not be well for him to come again, as all declared.

Iron Ivan moved steadily forward until the point of rocks was reached.

There he stopped, and removing his hat, peered cautiously around, taking a good survey of the scene beyond.

When he had evidently satisfied himself, he drew back and motioned for his lieutenant and the men to approach, and they advanced and joined him.

"What ar' et like?" questioned the Terrible. "They have laid siege to us, and no doubt about it," was the answer.

"How many be thar of 'em?"

"Fifty, at a guess. Take a look at them."

The Terrible poked his head around the corner and surveyed the scene as Ivan had done.

"That's what they means, sure as shootin'," he agreed. "They has their line clear across ther open, an' a mouse couldn't git through."

"And it looks like the work of Deadwood Dick. I guess I'll step out and hail them, and give them a word of defiance. It won't do any harm to let them know that we know they are there."

"That's so; but be keerful they don't plug yer."

"Better show a flag o' truce," suggested one man.

"Think I will do that," Ivan agreed. "They are not likely to disregard that, and it will be better."

Taking a handkerchief from his pocket, he fixed it upon the rifle of one of his men, and holding it aloft, stepped out into plain sight.

"Hello!" he called out.

The attention of the other camp was drawn at once, and it could be seen that excitement prevailed.

"Hello to yourself!" came back the answering shout.

"Who is captain of your little army?" Iron Ivan asked.

"Deadwood Dick," was shouted back.

"Tell him to step out and show himself, and I'll talk with him."

The word was passed along, and presently from the rear came a man who had one arm in a sling.

"How are you, Deadwood?" Iron Ivan called out. "You see I have a flag of truce flying, and I know you won't disregard that. Thought perhaps you would like to see me alive and well."

"Yes, I am glad to see you alive and well, Iron Ivan," was the response. "It shows me that my prey is ready for me. I find you in good company, as usual, and, as you see, we are

preparing to starve you out. You had better surrender."

"Ha! ha! ha!" was the defiant laugh. "I rather guess not, my jolly detective. If you want us, come and take us. You will get the warmest reception you ever got in your life. And you can't starve us out, either, for we have enough provision on hand to last us half a year."

"I know you are lying when you say that," was the retort. "I sized up your camp last night. But I didn't suppose you would surrender. No matter, you hold out a little while, and the first you know I will have the whole nest of you, big and little together. Just tell your men that Deadwood Dick says so. What did you want to say to us—anything important?"

"Yes, something important," was the response. "I want to say to you that I am captain of this band now, and that I defy you and all the force you can bring with you. And I want to tell you that if we capture you, as we intend to do if we can, you will wish you had never been born."

"I can laugh at all that, Iron Ivan. 'You know me well enough to know that I don't scare. Slink back into your rat's hole, and remain there till I am ready to drag you out. And it won't be a great while, either.'"

"All right, we will await your pleasure, but devil help the first man of you who shows his nose around this point of rocks."

"You bet!" approved Thomas the Terrible, in low tone. "Give et to 'em, Iron Ivan."

"It is needless to warn us of that," was the returning shout. "Don't take us for fools. When we make a move it will be one that will surprise you."

"All right; but what's the matter with your arm?"

"Oh, nothing, only a pill I got the night I laid out your other captain. I will pay that back with interest."

"Take care the next one you get doesn't strike nearer home, that's all. And now good-by for the present. See you later. Ta, ta!"

"Yes, you shall see me later, I promise you that," was the responding shout.

"Ha! ha! ha!"

And with that wild, defiant laugh, Iron Ivan drew back behind the protecting corner.

"That will let them know that we are ready for them," he observed. "It will do them good to let them see that we are wide awake."

"Yas, you bet it will. An' right here an' now, Iron Ivan, we wants ter tender ter you our most humble 'pology.'"

"Your apology? What for?"

"Why, fer ther wrong we done yer when yer fu'st kem ter camp yesterday. We took you fer Deadwood Dick, yer knows."

"Oh, don't mention that. It was a mistake you were likely to make anyhow, and you can't be too careful, you know. It shows that you are not asleep, and that a fraud couldn't be worked on you."

"Wull, we takes et back, anyhow. We has now had all ther proof we wants that you ar' ther genuwine article, with ther stamp mark still on yer. We has ther consait that we knows ther genuwine when we sees et, an' ef we gits taken in et wull be our own fault, an' we won't kick."

"That's a sensible view to take of it. If you get fooled, when you are sober and have your eyes open, then you hadn't ought to kick. But, now let's get back to the camp, and see what else can be done to strengthen our lines. You have seen Deadwood Dick, and heard what he said. We must look out for him. If he steals a march on us it will be our own fault."

Men were left on guard, half-way across the "playground," and the others retired to the home base.

"You say you have another way out of here?" questioned Iron Ivan, then.

"You bet we has!" was the exclamation. "Come, an' we'll show et to yer at oncet, an' see what yer thinks of et."

"All right, I will, and to-night I may have occasion to use it. Deadwood Dick has been here and has written his defiance on our doors; I jather think Iron Ivan will return the compliment."

This was greeted with wild approval, and Thomas the Terrible led the way to show the other means of communication with the outer world.

CHAPTER X.

INQUIRY FOR DEADWOOD DICK.

NEAR the middle of the camp, yet back nearly to the wall, was a well.

It had been dug there the first time the camp

had been under siege, when it was death to go to the creek for water.

As the camp was on a flat, it was reasonable to suppose that water would be found at no very great depth, and so the pent-up outlaws, almost in despair, then, had begun to dig for it.

They went down some twenty feet or more, without any sign of water, and were in something of despair, when suddenly a surprising thing happened to them. The bottom dropped out of their well, and the diggers were deposited some feet below, in a stream of running water.

Fortunately it was not deep, and was running sluggishly, and no harm was done. In fact, it was a blessing to them, and proved a blessing in more ways than one, later on.

The men were hauled out, a supply of water was taken, and after that the men set about exploring their find. A ladder was made, and half a dozen of them went down.

They had torches, and were gone a considerable time.

When they returned they had good news to report. They had found something of a cavern down below, and following it, had found a way out. They held the best hand, after all!

And this was the secret of the matter.

Iron Ivan wondered where the entrance to the way of escape could be.

He had had his eyes well about him, had made a search for it in a quiet way, and was puzzled to know.

When Thomas the Terrible led the way, with a rope ladder on his arm, he was puzzled all the more. He imagined it must be through a hole under some one of the several shanties.

What was his surprise, then, to be led direct to the camp's well, which he had never thought of in connection with the secret.

"You don't mean to tell me that you get out this way?" he said.

"Waal, I reckons we does, then!" laughed the Terrible.

"But, how do you get out? Where does the well lead to? This is a plan that could never be suspected. Ha, ha, ha! Deadwood Dick, we can laugh defiance at you!"

"I should sough up a couple o' cats ef we couldn't," Thomas agreed. "Why, et would puzzle ther Old Boy himself ter guess ther secret. An' yer see that 'ar cabin thar hides et from ther other side. Et war put thar on purpose."

He was then given the story of the means of escape, how it had been discovered, etc. And when the story had been told, Thomas the Terrible invited him to go down and see for himself.

To this Iron Ivan agreed, gladly, and he and the Terrible went down, bearing torches.

The ladder was of sufficient length to lower them to the water, and they stepped off into the bed of the underground creek.

"Now then, right this hyar way," conducted Thomas, "an' we'll soon be goin' through one of ther dandiest caverns yer ever sot eyes on in yer life. Follow me, an' don't be afeerd."

"Little danger of my being afraid, I think," was the cheerful response.

Thomas led the way, and a wild, awe inspiring way it was.

For a distance they followed the bed of the creek, then came to a place where the cavern broadened, and here they left the creek and walked alongside of it.

And here was one of the grandest sights ever seen, in its line. The top and sides of the cavern were covered with gleaming stalactites, which flashed and glistened under the torchlight as though composed of diamonds.

But this by the way. They pressed on, keeping to the course of the creek, and finally light was seen ahead.

"Thar is daylight," spoke Terrible Thomas, then, "an' we'll soon be out."

"I wonder this cavern has never been discovered from the other side."

"Yer won't, when yer sees ther hull of et."

Finally the opening was reached, and the roar of a falls greeted their ears as they came to it.

Here the creek rolled lazily out, suddenly to start into life as it went over the ledge and dashed itself below a hundred feet or more.

Iron Ivan looked out and down.

Below the falls, half the distance down, was a ledge, from which escape looked possible.

"Now yer sees how et ar'," spoke his guide.

"We has a ladder hyar, an' we lets it down, an' down we goes."

He threw a rope-ladder over while speaking, and laid hold upon it to descend, telling Ivan to follow him.

"It would be a bad joke to find the ladder

pulled up when we wanted to get back, the latter remarked.

"Thar's a way of gettin' around that, too," was the reply.

"And how is it?"

"Yer see ther top hyar ar' open fer a distance back, an' et ain't very high."

"Yes."

"Wull, thar's a trail as leads around to et, an' all that has ter be done is ter go around, climb up, an' then drop in."

"I see; but why isn't that used altogether?"

"Et most allus is, daytimes, but o' nights et ar' safe enough ter leave ther ladder down."

Iron Ivan was posting himself upon every particular.

They descended the ladder, and the guide led the way to a point where the camp of Pond Lily could be seen from the ledge.

"Thar she be," he remarked, "an' you bet et war a surprise to 'em ther night we galoots went an' robbed 'em of feed enough fer a month or more."

"I can well imagine it, and it will be a surprise to them to-morrow morning, when they find the mark of Iron Ivan around their city walls, so to say. Let's go on, and you can show me the trail."

"I war thinkin' about that," was the answer.

"We mought be seen. Tell yer what is better. If you is bent on goin' thar ter-night, why—"

"And I am, if all is quiet at the camp."

"Wull, I'll go with yer, ez fur as ther trail leads to ther main trail, an' thar I'll wait till yer comes back. Then yer won't make no mistake."

"Just the thing. We'll have it understood so."

That settled, after a further look around, and further explanations on the part of the Terrible, they set out on the back track to Coffin Camp.

All was quiet there, when they arrived, and leaving them for the present, let us turn a little of our attention to Pond Lily, where we have passing interest, and where exciting scenes are shortly to take place.

The leading saloon of Pond Lily was the "Royal Princess."

It was a palace in its way, and was managed by a woman, one "Queen of Diamonds," so called.

She was a woman of between thirty and forty, in point of years, with well-preserved appearance and stately carriage.

She was rather large of person, used a superfluity of paint and powder, and displayed a wealth in diamonds that was simply amazing. Her appearance told her story, and she was one of the best known characters of the "city."

Her palace was one of the several "wicked" spots of the camp, and was a favorite resort for all who wanted to see the "elephant," that fabled animal of unwritten fame.

Does the reader remember what Deadwood was, when in its glory?

Let him picture this camp of Pond Lily on the same scale, and he will have it in mind as it was.

What the "Metropolitan" was to Deadwood, that was the "Princess Royal" to Pond Lily. It was all the imagination can picture, and maybe more. Pen description is uncalled for.

On this afternoon all was quiet within its walls.

Night was the time when it held its high revel, and when the "elephant" was on exhibition.

The "Queen of Diamonds" had just come in, having slept all the forenoon and having just had dinner at this late hour at the hotel.

She was looking around her domain, giving orders here and there where things were not to her liking, and was seeing that everything was being put in order for the night's business.

While she was thus engaged, a rather flashily-dressed man entered, looking idly around.

He was not a bad-looking man by any means, was perhaps thirty-five years old, had mustache and imperial, and sported considerable jewelry.

The quick eye of the Queen of Diamonds soon caught sight of him, and she gave him a nod of welcome, although he was a stranger to her and had never, to her knowing, been in her place before.

He responded to the greeting, and advanced.

"A gay palace you have here, madam," he spoke.

"It is asleep now," was the smiling answer. "If you want to see it alive, drop in at ten or eleven to-night."

"I can imagine all that," was the rejoinder. "I am not new to such places, I assure you. By the way, you know everybody here, I suppose."

"Oh, no; I do not claim that distinction. Still, there are not many faces unknown to me."

"I can believe that. May I ask a question or two?"

"Why, certainly."

"Have you heard of a man called Deadwood Dick as being around here?"

"I have; he is here now, or not right in the camp, perhaps, but has his headquarters here at present."

"You know who and what he is, of course."

"A fearless detective, if all said of him is true."

"Yes; all of that. Have you seen him?"

"Yes; I have, sir."

"Do you think he will be in your place, to-night?"

"It is very likely that he will, if he is in town at all. My place is the main attraction, I am proud to say."

"I do not doubt your word. Its appearance proves it. Now if I am here, and this man comes in, will you do me the favor to point him out to me?"

"You intend him harm?"

"No, not at all."

"Very well, then, I will do what you request."

The stranger expressed his thanks, and presently went out. Who and what was he? What was his business with Deadwood Dick?

CHAPTER XI.

AT THE ROYAL PRINCESS.

THE remainder of that day at Coffin Camp passed quietly.

No attack was made on the camp by the besieging party, and there was no indication that any would be made.

Night came on, and when the outposts had been stationed, and every precaution against surprise had been taken, Iron Ivan announced his intention of going to the city of Pond Lily.

"I want to show them that Iron Ivan is as good a man as Deadwood Dick, every day in the week," he declared. "It won't do for them to have the laugh on us, pards, not by any means. When they awake to-morrow morning they will find our defiance written all over their town."

"That's ther proper tune!" coincided Thomas, surnamed Terrible. "Go, an' good luck go with yer. An' ef yer kin see Deadwood Dick one better, do et."

"I will, be sure of that. But, about your going with me to the end of the trail—your place is here. Another man can go with me just as well, any one who is well acquainted with the trail."

"Jest what I war thinkin' erbout before you mentioned et. It won't do fer loth of us ter be absent ter oncet, that's sure, an' et ar' jest ez sure that I ain't ther one ter go ter Pond Lily. Now hyar is Jonah, who knows ther trail all right, an' he will be jest ther one."

"Very well, then, you and I for it, Jonah. I don't suppose you are the same Jonah who swallowed the whale, but you look like a pretty honest outlaw, on the whole, so I'll take you."

"Honest!" exclaimed Jonah. "I'm ther most honestest boss-thief you ever sot eyes on, I am. You'll find that I'm ther r'ale prime article, and ther best jedge o' poor whisk in ther hull durn hills."

"And that reminds me, Thomas," said Iron Ivan, "that there must be no drinking here. Every man must be as sober as a judge, ready to defend our camp if an attack is made."

"Trust me ter see ter that," promised the Terrible. "Thar'll be no drinkin', that I 'sure yer. Not ef Terrible Thomas is any good, an' he thinks he ar'."

That point was insisted upon by the new captain of the band, who evidently had the well-being of the camp at heart, and when other details had been arranged, Iron Ivan and his man Jonah set out.

Descending the well, they went through the cavern in the manner before described, descended again to the trail at the falls, and thence on in the direction of Pond Lily until they came out upon the main trail, where a halt was called.

"And here is where you are to wait for me, isn't it?" Iron Ivan questioned.

"Ther identic spot, 'cordin' ter program," Jonah assured.

"Very well, then, here I will leave you. Don't get into trouble, and don't fail to hail me if I go by when I return."

"Yours to ther boots," Jonah responded. "I ain't ther same Jonah of ther whale story, but I weigh jest as many ounces to ther pound, an' I'll bet on et. You kin 'pend on me."

Jonah was something of a great talker, but Iron Ivan cut him short on this occasion, and was soon on his way to Pond Lily.

It was something after nine when Iron Ivan walked boldly into the Princess Royal.

There was now a different scene from what we saw awhile ago.

To begin with, the place was now ablaze with lights, and a band was dispensing the latest popular airs.

In the far end of the long room was a stage, upon which two scantily attired young women were giving a song and dance exhibition to an admiring audience.

Nearer the front were gaming tables, well filled with eager, feverish devotees of that sort of amusement, while the foreground was occupied by the gorgeously appointed bars.

Between the bars and the gaming-tables were numerous drinking tables, and the same occupied the space beyond nearer the stage. A great crowd was present, and moving about among these tables, and elsewhere, were enticingly arrayed girls of varying degrees of good looks.

In such a place as this, a stranger attracted little notice upon entering, unless he did something out of the usual to draw attention upon himself.

Nothing of this sort did Iron Ivan, but advanced down the room with cool and leisurely air, his handsome face wearing its half smile, and his keen eyes taking in everything that was to be seen.

On the right of the room, half-way down and opposite the gaming-tables, sat the Queen of Diamonds, feeling like a queen indeed, perhaps, as she surveyed this den of iniquity, all her own, and noted the golden stream that was pouring into her coffers. And she noted Iron Ivan as he approached.

Not far from her, at one of the small tables, with one of the mentioned enticingly arrayed girls beside him, sat the flashily dressed man with mustache and imperial who had that afternoon made inquiry for Deadwood Dick.

He, too, noticed the approach of the stranger, and glanced immediately at the Queen of Diamonds, as if to inquire if this was the man he desired to find.

The woman understood the meaning of his glance, and shook her head in the negative.

The man looked disappointed. Evidently he had taken this to be his man.

Iron Ivan came on, glanced at the man at the table, and on to the Queen of Diamonds, and thence to the gaming.

Giving a little attention to that, for a few minutes, he moved on toward the stage, where a handsome girl had just appeared to render a song, and sat down at a vacant table.

He had taken a seat with his back to the wall, where he could not only see what was going on upon the stage, but had a full view of all the rest of the room as well. And soon after he had taken his seat one of the girl waiters approached.

"What will you have, Charlie?" she asked, smiling.

"You haven't guessed right," was the response. "My name isn't Charlie, by several degrees. You may bring a bottle of wine, however, if you will sit down and drink it when it is brought."

"I'll do that, you bet!" was the exclamation, and away the girl tripped, evidently well pleased with the strike she had made.

The wine was soon before them, with glasses, and she proceeded to pour it out.

"Hold on," checked Ivan, when one glass had been filled. "Don't pour any for me."

"Not pour any for you!" in the greatest amazement.

"So I said. I don't indulge in that sort of thing any more. If you will think, you will remember that I ordered it on condition that you would drink it yourself."

"Yes, I know you said that, but I supposed you meant that I was to drink with you. Well, you are a goody-goody, for sure. No matter, I'll pour yours just the same, or Queen of Diamonds will notice it. You needn't drink it unless you want to."

"All right, pour it, if it is better for your business, and then if you do not object we'll talk a little. I am a stranger here, and I don't doubt but you can give me a good deal of information. But what shall I call you? A girl without a name is a poor piece of furniture."

The woman laughed.

"Rather, I should smile," she responded. "You may call me Daisy. And I am a daisy, too, you bet!" she exclaimed, archly, with a wink. "And as for information, I'm as full of it as I am of fun, and I'm as full of fun as I can be. And now what am I to call you, since you say that your name isn't Charlie?"

"Call me Charlie, as that is the name you seemed to think would fit me," was the reply.

"Now don't look around when I ask you this question, as that will give it away; but do you know who that man is over there by the table near the Queen of Diamonds?"

"You mean the one with the girl in red with him?"

"Exactly."

"Give it up. He's a stranger here, same as you are. He's been here an hour or more, and seems quite stuck on Rosy."

"Have you ever heard of Deadwood Dick?"

"Yes; he's in the camp, or was."

"This isn't he, then."

"Oh, no; nary. Dickey is younger, better looking, and has one arm in the hospital at present."

"Disabled, eh? I wanted to see him, if he is around. Do you think he will be in here to-night?"

"Another man who wants to see Deadwood Dick, are you?"

Iron Ivan looked at her questioningly.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked.

"Why, the stranger over there with Rosy, asked Queen of Diamonds about him this afternoon."

"About whom?"

"Deadwood Dick, of course."

"The deuce he did," and Ivan looked across at the stranger with renewed interest. "I wonder what he can want with him."

"I'll never tell you. I was in here this afternoon when he came in, and I heard him ask Queen if she would point him out to him, if he came in this evening, and she said she would."

"Perhaps, then, they mistook me for him, when I entered, for I noticed that the woman gave him a slight negative nod."

"Likely enough, if she did that."

"And you don't know who he is."

"Nary, as I said before."

"Well, perhaps we shall see when Deadwood Dick comes in, if he does come in. I hope he means him well, that's all."

"Then you are Dick's friend, I take it."

"Oh, yes, sure," with a smile that was a puzzle to the girl. She did not know how to take such a smile as it was.

Iron Ivan was looking in the direction of the front, just now, and entered as he spoke a young man with his arm in a sling. It was the man for whom he had been asking, Deadwood Dick.

"Hello! perhaps this fellow is he," he remarked.

"Yes, that's him," said the girl, with a glance around. "But how is it you don't know him, if you're his friend?"

"It is not uncommon for a man to have friends he has never seen," Ivan responded. And he watched the wounded man's approach. What was to come of a meeting such as this?

CHAPTER XII.

TROUBLE ON THE TAPIS.

THE man sauntered down toward the center of the room with careless ease.

Known there, much attention was turned to him as soon as he was noticed, and many eyes were upon him with keen curiosity.

With a reputation such as his, Deadwood Dick was a man to draw just such attention, wherever he made himself known. His recent doings further north, and now his having killed Guerrilla Jake, lionized him.

Iron Ivan had his eyes upon him, as said, and he was also paying attention to the Queen of Diamonds and the stranger who had made inquiry of her concerning Deadwood Dick.

The Queen noted the glances turned toward the front, and quick to follow them, saw who it was had entered.

With a glance at the man at the table near her, she gave him a signal that his man had come.

The stranger had quickly looked, and seeing the man indicated, rose from the table.

"Why, he's wounded!" Iron Ivan heard him exclaim.

"Yes, a bullet in his arm, received the night he killed Guerrilla Jake the outlaw," the woman answered.

Her reply was not in tones loud enough for Ivan to hear, but he saw that the wounded man had heard what the stranger had said. He turned him glance upon his immediately.

There was no sign of recognition in the look he gave him, but rather an expression of surprise upon his face.

He came steadily on, turning his attention to the gaming-tables as he drew near to them, and evidently giving no further thought to the man who had spoken concerning his wound.

Rosy, the girl in red, had risen at the same time the stranger did, greatly surprised, no doubt, at his sudden move, and stood just behind him.

Iron Ivan was observing everything.

He saw a look upon the stranger's face that boded ill for Deadwood Dick.

Hastily paying his score, he took abrupt leave of his Daisy and moved out toward the center of the room.

As the wounded but lionized hero came on, the stranger moved out to meet him, and presently planted himself right in front of him, demanding:

"Are you Deadwood Dick?"

"That is what I am called, sir," was the easy response.

"I'm glad you own it, for I have got a bone to pick with you, and I'm sorry you're wounded."

"A bone to pick with me, eh?" repeated the lion, not at all frightened. "I don't know you, and can't imagine what your 'bone' can be, as you call it. Still, you need not let my wounded arm make any difference."

Spoken like Deadwood Dick, truly.

"But it does make a difference. Were it not for that, I would give you a cut in the face that would make you hot for a fight. As it is, I can't strike you."

"But who are you? Where does your pain seem to lie?"

"Who am I? Who but the brother of a man whom you sent to prison for twenty years! You have got to answer to me for that, if not now, then at some other time. I can wait for your arm to get well."

Iron Ivan was moving near them, and now the attention of the whole room was upon them.

The Queen of Diamonds had left her place, and now touched the stranger upon the arm. Her manner was full of tigerish resolve.

"You told me that you meant this man no harm," she reminded.

"Neither do I, any more harm than he deserves," was the response.

"You deceived me, and I demand that you drop this quarrel at once, in my establishment."

"No harm shall be done your establishment, madam," was the rejoinder. "The man is in no shape to defend himself, so for the present I must let the matter drop."

"But I do not let it drop, not by any means," the wounded man spoke up. "You have addressed me in a manner that you must answer for. If I sent your brother to prison for twenty years, you ought to join him."

"You offer that as an insult!"

"If you want to take it so. If I am wounded, I can still shoot, and if you want anything of me, let us go out and settle it—twenty paces."

"No; I'll wait for your arm," was the retort, "and then we'll have it out at a shorter range. In the mean time, take that as a reminder to keep your blood boiling, so you will be in the right trim."

With that, he reached out, quickly, and gave his wounded enemy a stinging slap on the cheek.

Quick as a wink the man's well arm shot out, aimed at the ruffian's nose, but the blow was neatly parried, and the rascal laughed.

"You will have to wait till your arm gets well," he sneered, "and then it will give me satisfaction to do you up, as the boys say. You have the name of being something of a terror, but if you are you do not prove it with that crack."

"I'll show you about that," was the fierce retort. "Wounded as I am, I am not going to stand your abuse tamely. Look out for yourself. I will whip you with one arm, or take a whipping, just as it happens."

And the man stepped forward, with arm ready to begin, when Iron Ivan took a hand in the affair.

"Pardon my interrupting, gentlemen," he spoke, "but I have a word to say before this goes any further. Are you Deadwood Dick, sir?"

"Yes, I am Deadwood Dick," the wounded man answered.

"Very well, then. I am a man whom you know, and yet who is unknown to you just now. You are in no condition to fight, or even defend yourself. Allow me to take up your cause against this cur."

"Have a care," cried the stranger, "or you will have a cause of your own to attend to. I allow no man to call me a cur or any other name. For a single penny I would knock you off your pins. This is no affair of yours, and you want to keep out of it."

"Knock me off my pins, would you?" Ivan sneered. "Let me know when you begin to do

it, coward. And coward you are. No other would strike a wounded man."

The Queen of Diamonds had taken steps to have the men put out, or at any rate to separate them, but by the time she got her forces together the crowd was too great for them to do anything.

And that was just the kind of a crowd that had rather see the difficulty to the end, than to have it nipped in the bud. The men shouldered up closely, and refused to make way, so the chances were that the trouble would have to be settled by the three men concerned.

"You seem to want to get yourself into trouble," cried the stranger.

"I care little whether I do or not," was the response. "You can't impose on this wounded man when I am around."

"And who the deuce are you?"

"A match for you, I fancy."

"We'll see about that, curse you!"

"All right, whenever you please. May I make your cause my own, while I am about it, sir?" to the wounded man.

"It is asking too much," was the response. "I am not afraid of him, and he can no more than whip me anyhow. I will show him that Deadwood Dick is no coward, in spite of report."

"And whip you he probably would, sir, disabled as you are. Step back, and let me polish him off."

"You seem to speak as though you are sure you can do it," the stranger sneered.

"I have that much conceit for you to knock out of me, anyhow," Iron Ivan declared. "Come for me, now, and let me see what you are made of."

"Gentlemen!" the Queen of Diamonds continued to cry out. "Gentlemen! This must go no further! I will not have such scenes here in my palace! I forbid it. You must desist and withdraw to the street!"

She did not want such scenes, that was true, but they were of almost nightly occurrence in her gilded den of iniquity. Quite often she could quell the storm before it burst, and get the belligerents outside, but quite as often she could not, and the trouble was settled there.

So, little attention was paid to her just now, except to keep her men from interfering to any purpose.

"I'll show you what I am made of," the stranger retorted. "I don't know who you are, and don't care. I'll show you that you can't frighten Idaho Jo, and don't you forget it!"

"Hal so you are Idaho Jo, are you? Glad to know you. Perhaps we shall become better acquainted before we leave Pond Lily. I hope so, anyhow."

"What do you mean by that, curse you?"

"Just what I say, of course. I'm going to introduce myself to you now in a way that will mark a beginning. Are you ready?"

"Yes, I am ready."

"Then look out. Where will you have it?"

"Right there!"

With the word, his arm shot out, intending to take Ivan squarely on the jaw, but the blow was warded off easily.

"That is a funny place to hit a man," Iron Ivan taunted. "If I hit you there I am not likely to do you much damage, I fancy. See how you like it here."

There was a feint, the stranger warded, and before he could recover again, the intended blow followed. Ivan's fist caught him on the chest with a tap that made him stagger.

"I don't want to spoil your beauty for you," Ivan remarked, "or I would have let you have it on the nose. Maybe a few like that will show you that you have taken hold of the wrong pig this time. What do you think about it?"

The stranger was too enraged to answer.

He was white to the lips, and his eyes gleamed murderously.

With a snarl, he sprung forward, delivering two quick, powerful blows, first with one fist and then with the other.

Both were turned aside with the utmost ease, and Iron Ivan stood there laughing at him, while the crowd gave a round of applause. For the crowd it was the best kind of sport.

CHAPTER XIII.

PECULIAR HAPPENINGS.

IDAHO JO was not an unknown character altogether.

There were men in that room who had heard of him, one of whom, by the way, was Deadwood Dick.

Not only had he heard of him, but he was a man whom he wanted. With the others who

of him, he had heard little good of him. At best he was a blackleg of low degree. At the moment Idaho Jo was thoroughly amazed.

Such neat and easy sparring as this was something he was not accustomed to.

Something of an artist himself, in the fistic way, he did not know what to make of this.

"You will do, stranger," remarked the wounded Deadwood Dick. "I couldn't do it any more neatly myself, and in truth not half so well. Go for him, and give him a gentle reminder for me while you are about it."

"He will not do it again," declared Idaho Jo, boastfully. "I see he is a little better posted in the art than I thought he was. I'll try you again, my fine fellow, and see what you will make of it. Now put up your dukes, and I'll settle for you in short order."

"If you can," remarked Ivan, smiling.

Idaho Jo advanced, sparring his ablest, and for a few moments there was as neat an exhibition as is rarely seen.

Then came a moment when there was an opening, straight for Ivan's nose, and it was an opportunity too good to be missed. Idaho Jo's arm shot out with lightning quickness.

But that opening proved to have been a trap—a delusion and a snare, as it were. It disappeared even quicker than the blow, and the blow was turned aside, almost taking Jo off his feet. It was a surprise again.

It did not end there, however, for when the force of the blow had carried Jo around, side to his opponent, Ivan caught him by the neck and seat and pitched him bodily over the heads of the crowd, where he fell sprawling in the most undignified way that can be imagined.

The crowd cheered, to a man.

"Who are you, stranger?" was the shout that was raised.

"A better man than I am, at present, at any rate," declared Deadwood Dick the wounded.

"But no better man than Deadwood Dick, when he is in good order, of that I assure you, gentlemen," Ivan declared.

There was no time to say more.

The crowd moved back from where the fallen Idaho Jo had dropped, and he was scrambling to his feet, cursing in his rage.

"You will never do that dirty trick to any other man!" he cried. "Curse you! I will cut your heart out!" And rushing forward, he drew a knife as he came.

But he stopped, for into the hands of Iron Ivan leaped two revolvers, at full cock.

"Better hold up there, and go slow!" he quickly warned. "If you don't, there will be a funeral in the near future."

"Curse you!" the enraged man cried again. "My quarrel was not with you, but now I challenge you to come out and meet me with revolvers at thirty steps, and if I don't settle with you I'll take what you give me."

"Do you want to commit suicide?" Iron Ivan asked.

"That is a coward's bluff," was the retort. "I dare you to come out and face me!"

"A coward's bluff, is it?" repeated Ivan. "Do you see that top row of bottles on the most distant shelf over the bar there? Well, keep your eye on it for the space of five seconds."

The bottles in question were fancy bar bottles, with glass stoppers with ornamental tops. They were a long pistol range distant, and not very large targets, but were in good light, and Ivan raised one of his weapons and pointed at them.

There was a sharp report, and one of the glass stoppers was shattered. Then another report, and another top leaped into a thousand fragments. Yet another, and the third stopper was demolished. Another still, with similar result. And so on, until five had been broken straight.

"Are you satisfied now?" Ivan asked. "If not, come on, and I will pick off some of your vest buttons."

"Curses upon you!" the baffled Idaho Jo hissed, as he turned and walked to the rear of the room. "I may get a chance to square the account with you. And when I do—"

He did not finish the threat.

"When you do," completed Ivan, "you will probably find me ready for you."

"I beg of you, sir, stop this awful business in my place!" cried the Queen of Diamonds, almost hoarse with her protestations. "You will ruin my palace, if you keep on."

"It is all over, so far as I am concerned, madam," spoke Ivan, politely. "Say how much damage I have wrought, and I will pay the score with pleasure. The pistol practices were well worth the cost, I do not doubt."

"A hundred dollars will no more than repair the damage," the Queen declared.

"And here is the sum," said Ivan, handing over a bill. "I consider myself fortunate to get off so well."

"You are a gentleman," the woman flattered, as she received the money.

The height of the excitement had now been reached and passed, as it seemed, and the crowd began to break away.

Rosy, the girl in red, had deserted her disgraced companion of the hour, but Daisy, the one who had made the acquaintance of Iron Ivan, pressed forward to congratulate him.

But Ivan evidently had no further use for her, so she got no encouragement. And besides, many were demanding to know who Ivan was.

"You all seem eager to know who I am," he responded, finally. "When I am ready to take my leave, and that will be shortly, I will tell you. For the present, Deadwood Dick, a word with you."

"As many words as you want, in a friendly way," the wounded man responded. "Shall we take a seat?"

"No; I can tell you standing. I shall meet you again, ere long, when we will settle a matter of business we have between us. I have helped you out of this trouble to reserve you for myself."

The wounded man looked surprised.

"I fail to understand what you mean," was his response.

"Well, you cannot fail to understand this: You want to look out sharp for this man Idaho Jo. He means you harm, and is none too good to stab you in the back. I can say no more."

"But, who are you?"

"As I am about going now, I do not mind telling you that," was the answer.

He did not tell, however, at any rate not yet, but worked his way nearer to the door, keeping his eyes well about him.

"Well, who are you?" the wounded man again demanded.

Iron Ivan had now gone far enough to have the crowd before him, and whipping out his revolvers, covered the crowd, exclaiming:

"I will now tell you who I am, I am a better man than Iron Ivan, present captain of the band of Coffin Camp. I am here to give you my best compliments, and to say that Coffin Camp bids defiance to you, one and all. What are you going to do about it? Hal hal hal!"

For a few seconds he stood there, enjoying the consternation and surprise his words had made, and then with a bound he was out and away.

With his disappearance the spell was broken.

"Iron Ivan!" cried Deadwood Dick. "It seems impossible. It can't be that he has dared to come here, can it?"

"Yer heard what he said," responded a rough voice. "He said he saved you because he wanted yer fer himself. After ther cuss, boyees! After him!"

A wild whoop and yell greeted that shout, and the crowd broke for the street, many with weapons drawn, eager for the blood of this most notorious of daring road-agents who had ever appeared in that section.

But search as they would, Iron Ivan was not to be found.

Within the hour the whole camp was scoured, so to say, but the man had disappeared.

"It is too bad," remarked Deadwood Dick, the wounded, "but we shall soon have him now. Tomorrow will open a surprise for him, if I mistake not."

In the mean time, shortly after the disappearance of Iron Ivan from the saloon, a stranger entered the leading hotel, making inquiry of the clerk for one Madge Marble, who, as will be remembered, had come to Pond Lily by the special stage.

Told that she was there, he asked to be shown to her room, explaining that he was Howard Marble, the lady's husband. He wanted to have a brief interview with her, he said.

He was a man of medium height and well proportioned, wearing a full beard.

Without delay he was shown to the woman's room, where, as soon as he was admitted, he snatched off the beard and clasped the woman to his breast.

The man was Iron Ivan!

Their first fond embrace exchanged, with kisses, Ivan led the woman to a seat and there, hands clasped in hands, fondly, they held an hour's animated conversation.

What that conversation was concerning is not for us to disclose.

At the end of an hour, the man put on his dis-

guise again, left the room, and descended to the bar-room. And there he met another bearded man, one with whom he held a long talk.

Finally the two parted company, both going out and each setting off in a different direction.

It was a late hour when Iron Ivan finally rejoined his man Jonah and set out for the rendezvous at Coffin Camp.

On the way he told Jonah something of what had taken place, coloring it to best tickle that worthy's fancy, and leaving it to him to tell the others at the camp.

Next morning, when Pond Lily got up—so to put it, the whole camp went howling wild.

In various places were notices signed by Iron Ivan, bidding defiance to the camp, its mayor, Deadwood Dick and everybody else!

But a greater surprise was in store. On the street, half-way from the den of the Queen of Diamonds to the leading hotel, was found the body of a man with a cruel knife-thrust in his breast. The body was still warm, and the deed must have been done within the hour—in fact, since daylight. And on the breast of this dead man was a card, on which was penciled:

"By the hand of Iron, Man of Iron."

CHAPTER XIV.

A THRILLING SURPRISE.

THE dead man was a stranger. At first no one recognized him, but finally came others who said they had seen him about town on the previous evening.

And if Pond Lily had been in a furor over the finding of the placards left by Iron Ivan, much more so now at this finding of bloody work done by his hand. Mayor Kentway rose more furious in his wrath than ever, and declared that the Lily Mine would not do a tap until the outlaw band was wiped out.

Dispatching a messenger to Deadwood Dick, the wounded captain of the besieging hosts, he himself got together another body of men, and with them went out of the valley to the West. Whither he was going none knew, but it was plain that now had come the decisive moment in the warlike situation. Such a determined move as this must settle the matter one way or the other.

The body of the dead man had been taken up and laid out in a vacant shed, to be identified during the day, if possible.

The strange woman, Madge Marble, seemed to have interest in it in some way, that is—in the crime. She viewed the body, but without any sign that she recognized it, but she lingered around the shed for some time, and after that, was seen wandering from place to place about the camp, seemingly aimlessly.

A close observer would have noted, perhaps, that her movements were in accord with those of Idaho Jo. But if watching him, it was done so skillfully that he was none the wiser.

As for him, Idaho Jo, he made himself free and easy about the camp, hoping that the end would be a success and that Iron Ivan would be brought in for hanging.

In that event, he declared his intention of doing a little pistol practice at his body as it swung.

He had viewed the body, too, but like others, did not know the man.

The stockholders of the Lily Mine gathered at the company's office, some time after breakfast, and there awaited the outcome of the battle at Coffin Camp.

That affair, by the way, was the great event of the year, and it required all the best efforts of the leading men of the home guard to keep the town from being deserted.

Everybody wanted to go out into the valley behind the besiegers, at the point of rocks, and there witness the struggle, or what they could see of it, keeping out of danger themselves. And many did go, too.

As it was pointed out, however, that it was leaving the camp open to attack, in case the outlaws, taking advantage of their secret means of egress, saw fit to make such a counter move, all who had family or property to defend, remained. And they were in sufficient number for defense.

At Coffin Camp, to change the scene to that delectable spot, the morning sun had found things about as usual.

Iron Ivan and the Terrible were up bright and early, and presently they set out to the point of rocks to reconnoiter. And they went under protection, as before.

When they peered around, a strange sight met their gaze. A board fence—for want of a better name for it, about four feet high and

thirty feet long, had been erected, apparently as a breastworks.

But a second look showed that it could not be intended for that. It was but a frail affair, and would afford little or no protection against bullets. What it was intended for was a puzzle. Men were busily at work behind it, as could be seen, but what they were doing could not be conjectured.

"What in ther dickins be they doin' thar?" demanded Thomas the Terrible.

"You will have to tell me," responded Iron Ivan.

"But what on 'arth kin them 'ar boards be fur? Et can't be thet they looks fer us ter tackle 'em, kin et?"

"No; it can't be that. It is some secret work that is going on, and you may look for a surprise, after they get ready. Deadwood Dick is up to some sort of game."

"Waal, cuss him, let him tinker away, ef he wants ter. I opine thet we don't keer a continental gum-drop fer him. Ef he looks fur us ter come out hyar ter do battle, he's mistaken, that's all."

"I think I'll hail him again, and ask him what he's up to."

"I wish yer would, be gum. Et worries me, et do, ter have sich a puzzle on ther brain."

Iron Ivan prepared his flag of truce as on the other occasion, and stepped boldly forth from shelter, calling out:

"Hello-oo!"

Work stopped at the enemy's camp, and the shout came back.

"What are you up to over there?" Ivan shouted his question. "What kind of monkey-work do you call that?"

"That's ther cheese," applauded the Terrible. "Make all ther fun of 'em yer wants ter. We don't keer two cusses an' a half fer 'em, we don't."

The wounded leader of the besiegers, his arm in its sling, stepped around into sight, he also bearing a white rag of truce.

"Are you going to surrender?" he called out.

"Not by a batful!" cried Iron Ivan. "What do you take us for, anyhow?"

"We take you for a precious set of rascals, that's what, and if you don't come out of your hole and give yourselves up by ten o'clock, you will hear something drop."

"Hal hal hal!" laughed Iron Ivan. "Let us see you carry out your threats, and not do so much talking about it. If you can get us out, do it, that's all. But what is that thing you have got there? What do you call it? Have you named it yet?"

"That's it! That's ther stuff!"

So chuckled Thomas the Terrible, from his place.

"You will learn what we have got here, at ten o'clock, if you have not come to terms by that time. You are warned."

Again did Iron Ivan send back a laugh of defiance, and after some further exchange of words he withdrew around the point.

"I don't know what it can be," he said to the Terrible, "but I am afraid they have got a surprise of some kind in store for us. We must be on the lookout for it, or we may get dumped."

"Don't we hold the best hand, though?" questioned Thomas. "Don't see what et kin be they has got laid by fer us. Anyhow, I reckon we will make 'em sweat ef they gits too close to our poppers. Let 'em come an' try et on, ef they don't believe it. An' let us oncet git holt o' that Deadwood Dick, an'—um!"

"But we haven't got him yet, and I tell you what it is I am anxious about that new-fangled notion they are making out there. I'll tell you what, Thomas, we must have that ladder all in order, and be ready to get out as fast as we can, if they come for us in a way we think we can't stand. We won't mention this to the men, but it will do no harm to be prepared."

"Jest so, an' I 'grees with yer on that. Ther ladder shell be ready fer biz, you bet."

And so it was arranged, as soon as they reached the buildings once more. It was better to be ready than to be left in the lurch, as Thomas said.

The men were told to be ready to set out for a raid on Pond Lily, if it was thought best to make it, when the attack was over, if one was made and they drove the enemy back.

This arrangement tickled them all, and so everything rested while time rolled on toward the hour of ten, an hour that was awaited with a good deal of anxiety by the two leaders—especially Thomas the Terrible, who was getting decidedly nervous over the matter.

Finally the hour was at hand.

A few minutes later and the wounded Dead-

wood Dick appeared at the point of rocks with a flag of truce.

Iron Ivan stepped out into sight, demanding to know what was wanted, and at the same time ordering his men not to fire under any circumstances as long as the flag was there.

"Are you going to come out and give yourselves up?" was the demand.

"Do you take us for fools?" was the retort.

"If you don't surrender you will probably regret it," was the warning.

"We'll take the chances of that," was the defiance. "Do your worst, and be careful that you don't get into our hands."

The man withdrew, and for a few minutes all was still.

"What kin be comin'?" questioned the Terrible.

"We will probably soon see," said Ivan.

Presently a loud, ringing shout was heard, and then into sight around the corner came the besiegers, and in their midst was the mysterious frame of wood, now looking to be on wheels.

There appeared to be a hundred men in the line, most of whom were behind the board breastworks, as it was now taken to be, and they swung around facing the camp and there stopped. It was at too long range for firing to be very effective, and it was naturally thought they were preparing for a rush.

"That's their idee!" cried the Terrible. "They means ter come fer us with a big swoop, keepin' behind that thing fer protection. Haw! haw! haw! That's erbout ther weakest thing I ever did see. If this ar' a sample o' Deadwood Dick, he don't amount ter shucks, an' that's my candid opine o' him. Let 'em come, an' ef we don't most everlastin'ly knock—"

But there he stopped, his jaw dropped, and his eyes fairly bulged.

The framework of boards had suddenly dropped, and there, exposed to plain view, were half a dozen cannons!

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Iron Ivan, "what are we going to do now? A broadside from them will wipe us out as clean as can be. We mustn't let them give us a dose of that medicine, Terrible."

"Howlin' heathen! No! Whar on 'arth did they git cannons? What in ther dickens is goin' ter be done? Must we surrender? Et won't do ter fire at 'em! Can't yer stop 'em, Iron Ivan?"

All the rascals were fairly trembling in their boots, now, and badly scared indeed.

It was a surprise such as they had not looked for.

At that moment, the cannons having been ranged, Deadwood Dick appeared with his flag of truce again.

Iron Ivan lost no time in getting out to respond to it. It would not do to fool now, as the Terrible earnestly urged. He wanted the best terms possible.

The nest of outlaws awaited with feverish anxiety the outcome of this the last conference between the chieftains. What the outcome would be none could say, as it was all one-sided now, or seemed to be.

CHAPTER XV.

SURPRISES ALL AROUND.

"WHAT do you think about it now?" the captain of the attacking party bailed.

"We have to admit that you hold the best hand," Iron Ivan admitted, freely. "We don't want any of that sort of stuff, if you please."

"Well, then, what are you going to do about it? Will you lay down your arms and surrender, and come out here and give yourselves up as our prisoners? That's the only thing to be done."

"What terms will you give us?" Ivan asked. "We don't propose to give ourselves up to be hanged, not by a good deal. If you will give us our lives, we will think about surrender. Otherwise, I think we'll die fighting, and I guess we can make it a serious job for some of you before we are done."

"Well, I'll tell you what we'll do," the wounded Deadwood Dick shouted back. "We will spare the life of every man but you, Iron Ivan. You are my game, and you must swing! The others will be let off as easy as the law will allow, short of death. What do you say to this? This is the only terms you will get, so think it over. It is death to you, anyhow."

"All right; give us fifteen minutes to consult about it, and then we'll give you our answer."

"I'll do it. At the end of that time we open fire on you."

Out came Thomas the Terrible.

"We don't want no fifteen minutes," he shout-

ed. "We gives up, we does, an' we's comin' out thar now."

And he started, with his men filing after him, but they did not proceed far. The revolvers of Ivan the Man of Iron checked him and them.

"You cur!" Ivan hissed. "Do you mean to give me up to be hanged, when the offer for your own safety is made? If you take another step I'll drop you in your tracks."

"But et ar' every man fer himself," the Terrible doggedly muttered. "They means ter hang you, anyhow, as he has said, an' thar's no use our bein' killed when et won't help you a bit."

"You infernal cowardly traitor and whelp!" Ivan stormed. "This shows the sort of man you are. Get back there, or I'll drive lead through you! We'll take the fifteen minutes and use it in getting out by the secret way."

"Thunder!" Thomas exclaimed. "Thet ar' slipped my mind! Them cannons knocked everything clear out o' my head. Come, an' let's go with a run."

"Not so fast," Ivan ordered. "I am captain of this band, and I mean to be obeyed. The first man who refuses, dies! I'll shout back and tell them we'll consider for a few minutes and then let them know. Then we'll move back out of sight in a leisurely way and begin to get out."

"Waal, all right; do that."

So Ivan called out to the attacking chieftain: "That question isn't settled, quite. We'll consider it ten minutes and let you know."

"All right; but you had better make the ten minutes short," was the response. "You are fooling away time there."

Iron Ivan turned, ordering the men to go before him, and all retreated to the shelter of the buildings and there made all haste to the well.

"Now," directed Ivan, "down you go, one man at a time. You have got everything you want, I suppose, so there's no need for delay, and delay is mighty dangerous, I can tell you."

"Yas, yas, let's git down thar jest ez soon's we kin," urged the Terrible. "I wull go fu'st, an' ther rest kin foller me—"

"Hold your team a little," interrupted Ivan. "I am going to be the last, and you will stay with me here and go down ahead of me. Your life is worth no more than mine."

"That's what's ther matter," agreed Jonah, to which some others gave assenting voices. "Et ain't no fair fer you ter git out of ther way fu'st, Terrible, an' yer is a hog ter want ter do et. Let somebody humbler go fu'st—me, f'rinstance."

"All right, Jonah, you lead the way," directed Ivan, "and the others will follow as fast as possible. Soon as one is down, let another start, and it won't take us long to get out of range."

Jonah lost no time about getting below ground and as soon as he was near the bottom of the ladder Ivan told another man to start.

In this manner they were fast disappearing, but at the same time the attacking party were speeding across the "playground" toward the buildings, weapons in hand, the cannons being left behind.

About a third of the cutlaws had got down the ladder, when, suddenly, came a great yell, right in their midst, and there was an order for them to put up their hands or be shot down.

They were surrounded by grim rifles on every side, and there was nothing left but surrender, so Iron Ivan put up his hands without a protest.

"It is all up, Terrible," he remarked. "Up with them. They have played us a trick that we ought to have expected."

"Cuss ther luck, yas!" cried Thomas. "We had orter kept watch of 'em, but I never oncet thort of et."

"Bind them, every one," Deadwood Dick ordered, "and if one resists, shoot him as you would a coyote."

This direction was promptly obeyed, and not one of the rascals offered to resist.

In a brief time all were disarmed and bound with their hands behind their backs. And yet nothing had been heard from those who had gone down the well.

Now, however, the wounded Deadwood Dick stepped to the well and called down, asking if all was right. And the answer came back that everything was, and two men were directed to man the windlass.

Thomas the Terrible looked on in utter bewilderment, as these two men lent their strength to the windlass, wondering what could be coming up, and what was his surprise to see one of his rascally crew presently appear, bound and gagged, and disarmed like himself.

Iron Ivan looked on with a peculiar smile, a smile that was hard to understand then.

Up the prisoners were brought, one after another, each securely bound, showing that a trap of some sort had been laid in the cavern below.

"What in thunder an' blazes does et mean?" cried Thomas the Terrible, as he glared furiously around. "Thar's a durn traitor in ther camp, an' I know et!"

"It means that Deadwood Dick has been too many for you," the wounded man made answer. "You thought you were clever here, but you have been outdone in the neatest kind of way, as you shall presently see."

When the last prisoner had been pulled out of the well, up the ladder came Mayor Howland Kentway of Pond Lily, followed by a great number of his fellow citizens. And when all were out, three cheers for Deadwood Dick was proposed, and the cheering was done with a will.

"And now for the triumphant march to Pond Lily," spoke the mayor. "But first, sack this den of everything worth taking away, boys, and then we'll set fire to it, and wipe it out for all time."

With a whoop the men sprung to this task, and pretty soon the cabins and shanties were wrapped in flames. In a short time Coffin Camp would be a thing of the past, and would be no more save in legend.

When the buildings were all burning thoroughly, the march to Pond Lily was begun, headed by Major Kentway and the wounded Deadwood Dick, the prisoners being in guarded line, single file, with Iron Ivan at the head and Terrible Thomas next, the man Jonah bringing up the rear.

When they set out across the "playground," the line of cannons looked upon the crowd with aspect grim and deadly, but on nearer approach they seemed to dwindle into insignificance, and finally, when they were reached, they resolved into mere dummies of wood, painted to look like real instruments of deadly warfare! And at this discovery the rage of Terrible Thomas knew no bounds.

Ivan, the Man of Iron, seemed to take it philosophically, and as a matter of course.

With many a jest and jibe, the men of Pond Lily kicked them as they passed, and the procession continued on its way, wildly cheering.

The entry into Pond Lily was something to be proud of. The whole crowd of the victorious party was singing, shouting, waving hats, firing weapons, etc., and the entire camp turned out to welcome them.

Into the square in front of the leading hotel, and other important buildings, the prisoners were led, with Iron Ivan in conspicuous place, and there they were halted, under guard. And forthwith a place was arranged for Judge Lynch to sit, to give them immediate trial.

While this was being done, Idaho Jo pressed to the front.

"Ha! we have got you, my friend, have we?" addressing himself to Iron Ivan.

"I don't know what part we had in it," was the sarcastic retort. "I didn't see you at the front, that is certain."

"No matter, I am here now, and I want to fight you, if these citizens will free you and give me the chance. I'll settle accounts with you for last night."

"Let me put in a word here, Idaho Jo, if you please," spoke up the wounded Deadwood Dick, presenting a revolver at the fellow's head. "You are my prisoner, under charge of robbery and murder."

"Robbery! Murder! What—"

"Exactly so. You are wanted for robbery at a place over in Washington, and you are the murderer of—"

"I am no murderer!" was the cry, and the man's face was like death itself. "I defy you to prove it! Whom have I murdered? Come, explain that."

"You are the murderer of the man found dead here this morning. Oh! you may start, but we have the proof dead to rights against you. Men lay bold upon him!"

"This is a foul lie!" the man cried, as he struggled with the men who had nabbed him as he was trying to draw a weapon. "You can't prove it! Wasn't it done by the outlaw, Iron Ivan, this cuss you have here?"

"No, sir, it was not," spoke a woman's voice, and the woman, Madge Marble, stepped to the fore. "It was done by you, and here is the proof of it!"

She held out a photograph, one which pictured the fellow in the very act of stabbing the unknown man!

It was proof that could not be disputed, and reeling back, the fellow gasped:

"Who are you? How came you by this picture?"

"I am she who, in San Francisco, was known as Kodak Kate," was the clear and ringing response. "Now I am the proud wife of Detective Richard Bristol, better known to you as Deadwood Dick, Jr."

CHAPTER XVI.

TRIUMPHANT EXPOSE.

THIS was a surprise indeed.

"Your wife!" was the cry, as one man turned to the wounded Deadwood Dick.

"No; not my wife," was the response to that, "but the wife of the real Deadwood Dick. I am merely playing that role for a purpose."

Here was another and still greater surprise for many.

"Then who in thunder is the real Deadwood Dick?" cried Thomas the Terrible, fired with impatience. "Fer ther luv of goodness p'int him out to us, will yer, so's we kin gaze on ther cuss."

"If he will kindly step to the front, I will introduce him," was the quiet response.

To the amazement of the outlaws and many others, Ivan, the Man of Iron, stepped forward to the front, and was immediately released.

"Gentlemen, one and all," spoke the wounded man, "let me introduce Deadwood Dick, Jr., the thoroughbred detective of the country at large. He will now speak for himself."

"Cusses upon cusses on yer!" screamed Thomas the Terrible. "Then et war you, all ther time, what war runnin' us inter this hole, war et? Ef I had ther use o' my hands, wi' a weepin' in me fist oncet, I'd bore ye, you bet!"

"I have no doubt about it, my pretty fellow," Deadwood Dick the genuine responded, with his grim smile. "As it is, you will have to forego the pleasure."

Kodak Kate had stepped forward, and her right hand was held in Dick's left as he spoke. She, his wife, it was, proud, happy and smiling; the same Kodak Kate whom previous stories introduced.

"Yes, gentlemen of Pond Lily," Dick spoke, when Thomas the Terrible had been silenced, "I am Deadwood Dick. And now explanations are in order. Some time ago I received word from your mayor here to come down and try my hand at cleaning out the nest of vipers at Coffin Camp. I came here in disguise, had a conference with Mr. Kentway, and went away again. At that time we arranged all our plans of action, as far as possible, and you have seen the result."

"On the night when I shot Guerrilla Jake, I was coming here to begin the campaign. That sudden attack on the stage, and what followed, changed my plans somewhat. I dropped down from the stage just as it came into the camp, and held another secret interview with Mr. Kentway. I took leave of the camp, and finally came this man to play my part to impose upon you and these outlaws while I was taking the risk of invading their den to learn their secret. How that has worked you have all witnessed."

"That special stage with the stockholders of the mine was a part of the plan. Those gentlemen were all in the secret, and the robbery was no surprise to them. The only one to whom it was a surprise was my wife here, and it was a greater surprise to me to find her aboard. Her mother having died, she tells me she put her property into the hands of an agent for sale and set out to find me at once. She wrote me that she was coming, but her letter never reached me. This explains points that you can now fully understand. I spoke to her, there at the scene of the robbery, telling her in brief what was going on."

"Later I had an interview with her here at your hotel, when she volunteered to do all she could in the present case. And she has lent material help to this gentleman who has been passing for myself. His wounded arm, as I need not tell you, now that he has cast off the bandage, was only a sham to support the story he had to tell. We rather pride ourselves that we have done a clever stroke. Whether you agree with us or not, can make no difference in that respect. Mayor Kentway, your nest of vipers has been cleaned out and broken up forever, and here are the serpents. Do with them as you will. There are some other points to be cleared up, to satisfy the public mind, but I will let some one else speak now."

Wild cheering greeted his closing words.

"Let me say a word or two, please," spoke up Kodak Kate, as soon as she could make herself heard. "You want to know how I came by this picture that proves so positively that Iron Ivan did not kill the stranger. I had my camera with me, and at a very early hour this morning, at the window of my room, I was preparing to

take a view, when suddenly, just as I was ready, these two men appeared on the street, and this one drew a knife. There was a brief struggle, and seeing that murder was intended, and having no weapon in hand, I took a snap shot at the critical moment, and this picture is the result."

Again did wild cheering make the valley ring with its many echoes.

"After the deed had been done," Kate resumed, "I knew I could do nothing by raising an alarm, except to frighten away the murderer, so I finished the picture and shadowed the man, to see that he did not get away. If he had started to leave town, I would have arrested him. After the deed had been done, as I started to say, the murderer took a card from his pocket, wrote upon it hurriedly, and dropped it upon the breast of his victim, leaving it there. Undoubtedly the notices around the camp purporting to be the work of Iron Ivan, put the thought into his head, together with his desire for revenge for what he received last night."

"And about those notices," Deadwood Dick took up the thread again, "my man here put them up. And those at Coffin Camp, my good friend Thomas, I am the person who wrote them. You see I was in position to know what I was talking about. Ha! ha! You were neatly taken in."

"Yas, cuss ye!" was the grated response, "an' I'm only sorry we didn't burn 'ye at ther stake on sp'icion. I'll never be fooled again, you bet! Et war a mighty dirty piece of business, anyhow."

"You think so? Well, now, when a disease is desperate the remedy has to be suited for the especial case under consideration. This was the prescription for your case. And as for its being a mean trick—was it to be compared with the murders you and your cut-throats have committed there at Coffin Camp? Or was it any worse than the cowardly way in which you would have given yourself up, when you thought your life was to be spared, when mine was positively demanded? Bah! you miserable polecat!"

Mayor Kentway at once proceeded to open court. He gave the rascals a fair hearing, and charged them according to their deserts. Several were held on the charge of murder, and all on that of robbery.

Pond Lily was too far advanced in civilization to allow Judge Lynch to mete out justice to the rascals, though that was the sentiment of a big proportion of the crowd, so they were taken under strong escort to the nearest county seat, where they were put in jail.

That finally they came to the end they severally deserved, need not be dwelt upon here.

Idaho Jo went with them, under charges that made his fate assured.

The man whom he had murdered had been a partner of his in other crimes, and one who had a hold upon him. Threatening exposure, Jo had promptly used the knife upon him, never thinking that he would be caught in such a way, or in fact in any way, after his ruse to put the charge all upon Iron Ivan.

There was a meeting of the stockholders of the Lily Mine, together with the leading citizens of the camp, and Deadwood Dick was handsomely rewarded for his services, a fair proportion of which he immediately passed over to the man who had played his part at such a risk to himself.

This man was a citizen of another camp, a brave fellow with whom Dick had come in contact.

Pond Lily went crazy over the victory. All that day and nearly all night a great celebration was kept up. Many of the good citizens got pretty well "corned," and the "city" was painted red, figuratively.

Deadwood Dick and his bride, of course, were the stars of the occasion. The camp could not do enough in their honor, and gaping crowds watched them at every opportunity; but they took things quietly at the hotel.

A couple of weeks they remained at Pond Lily, and at the end of that time, after a rousing ball given in their honor, they took their leave, the good wishes of a host of friends going with them.

And so for the present, we must take leave of them, but to meet them again under circumstances startlingly novel, to say the least.

THE END.

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